

DARKEST ORIENT

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by

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CHAPTER I

THE JUDGMENT OF SOLOMON

I GAZED downward to where a bear and a leopard prowled craftily round a pit. The thermometer had registered some ninety degrees in the shade. Out there, in the sun, it was well beyond the century mark.

The air was heavy with the sweet, nauseating smell of blood, newly spilled. It came in warm gusts from the pit where two fine specimens of their species were engaged in mortal combat.

There was a tense and curious stillness, for the time for jungle histrionics had long since passed. Neither animal was snarling; each was conserving its strength.

The bear and the leopard were manoeuvring for that final encounter which must spell death for one or the other, for this was a battle to the end.

So far neither animal had secured an outweighing advantage. The bear had gouged out one of the eyes of the leopard with talons which still left bloody pug-marks when they touched the sand of the pit bottom. The bear had a gushing tear in its throat just short of the jugular, for a swift movement at a crucial moment had caused the cat to mistime its leap.

Now, all the preliminary snarlings and ravings had ceased, and all was ominously quiet within the blood-drenched pit but for the slight sound of tautly moving bodies. The end must come soon, and in the final flurry of unleashed elemental savagery, who could say which would win?

Again the blood smell came to me, wafted warmly from the pit, and my nostrils twitched; yet I watched, fascinated by the sight of two superb animals straining to kill, their every primeval instinct aroused in deadly blood-lust.

I saw the leopard poised for its final leap—a wonderful picture of symmetry and delicate balance. Lips were twisted back from immense yellow fangs in a feline snarl, and that one eye remained horribly steady and open.

The bear edged from side to side, oblivious of the jetting stream from its throat. Its action was grotesque, for its posture was half upright, and the fore-paws dangled down, stupidly, yet full of menace. Its steps were short and mincing, yet an occasional ripple of muscle told its tale of instant preparedness.

“A hundred rupees on the bear!”

Involuntarily I looked up, for here was a voice I had to obey. Even though I too favoured the bear I knew my part.

“I will take you, Your Highness.”

A slight nod greeted my words. If the bear won, as I believed it would, I should have to pay out a hundred rupees. My only solace lay in my ruminations. What after all, were one hundred rupees among so many? Regularly, two-thirds of my salary were

pouched by this and similar means, and I was expected to like it.

I am afraid that I am unable to divulge the name of my employer, but as he will appear frequently in these pages, he must have a name. Perhaps it will suffice if we call him the Khan. This will give no adequate clue to his long string of titles, and I shall be safeguarded.

Excited exclamations around me spoke of a new phase in the fight below, and the expressive features of the Khan eloquently portrayed his enjoyment. Normally nonchalant, and always exquisitely attired in the most expensive creations of Savile Row, he so far forgot himself as to lean forward well over the edge of the pit to the detriment of his carefully nurtured trouser creasings. He bit savagely at the small black moustache which he sported, and little globules of sweat appeared upon his forehead. Creases formed around his eyes, corrugating the olive skin of which he was so inordinately proud and which was massaged by a professional every morning of his life. His lips, normally full, now vibrated sensuously with his quickened pulse action! his fingers, long and tapering, and with only a slight darkening at the quicks to proclaim his Eastern origin, clawed nervously at the air, while his eyes, contracted almost to pin-points, reflected repletion in exotic, sadistic, animal satisfaction. His dilated nostrils sucked at the vapours of carnage; for the nonce he was lost in the spectacle of the kill.

I dragged my eyes away, and looked below. The leopard, terribly lacerated, and now entirely devoid of

sight, had leaped like the cat she was at a bear woe-fully weak from the loss of blood. Her fangs had made their mark, and her terrible claws, galvanised by the ferocity of a near-death, slashed and tore at the bear with demoniacal fury. Slowly the bear toppled, and the leopard tightened its grip upon its throat. All was over, and the leopard, and not the bear, had won.

The Khan rose—a signal that the entertainment was over—and signalled to an attendant. The man produced a rifle, and put the victor out of its misery.

The Khan beckoned, and I went to his side, but not to receive the hundred rupees which I had won. That was against etiquette. Money only passed when the Khan won. When he lost the Fates had been too unkind, and it was advisable not to remind him of the fact.

This man of many parts commenced to talk as we walked, and—of flowers. He was a man with a compartmental mind. One moment he could wallow in blood, and the next discourse on the arts and sciences. With perfect aplomb he could divorce himself, utterly and completely, from the passion and intrigue of his palace, and assume the role of the modern Solomon.

I recall an instance of this shortly before we were required to embark upon a lengthy and sustained holiday, and one which brought us into contact with so much that is subversive throughout the East.

The Khan, in his capacity as his father's Diwan, ruled over a species of supreme court. Here his word was literally law, and there was no appeal.

I must admit that in his curious, ill-balanced way

he largely succeeded in dispensing justice, for he knew nought of codes of criminal procedure, and cared less. He had his own methods in arriving at the truth, and they were such as would appal any properly constituted lawyer and anyone who has had the slightest association with the Inns of Court.

One morning he warned me that there had been an appeal against the verdict of a lower court, and that it would be necessary for him to review the papers which accompanied the case. Actually, what he meant was that a formidable dossier had been forwarded from the lower court, and that it would be my duty, as his secretary and companion, to digest these documents in my spare moments and provide him with a precis of some fifty words. Always he insisted upon brevity. I have known him to tear up a hundred words and angrily to demand whether I expected him to read a book!

The case in question was really a trivial one, but as soon as I opened the dossier, I realised that it had points of considerable interest.

Two women were primarily concerned in the appeal. One was the daughter of a fairly rich landowner, and the other was his daughter-in-law.

It seems that both ladies had married at approximately the same time, and with that high sense of duty which is so apparent in Eastern wives, had entered zealously into the happy condition of motherhood. The daughter was duly delivered of a daughter, but the daughter-in-law went one better, and produced a son.

Into these events had been woven a curious con-

spiracy and one which only those who understand the Eastern psychology on these subjects will readily comprehend.

The daughter-in-law, because she had produced a son, and heir, became the beloved of the old landowner. He showered jewels upon her, heaped praises upon his son, and devoted much time to his grandson.

The daughter, with only a female offspring to her credit, waxed lonesome. She was repeatedly upbraided by her husband who saw the estates passing to the child of a stranger, and there was much bickering, and many tears.

There is reason to believe that the unfortunate lady was well beaten with a slipper because of her lack of vision and preferment. Whatever happened, however, it sharpened her wits.

Suddenly, she staged a scene, and came out with the remarkable allegation that she had been the victim of a foul plot. She gave testimony on oath, and swore that she had in fact been delivered of a male child, and that her designing sister-in-law, who had given birth to a daughter, had darkly arranged for a substitution of their respective babies.

In a district purely agricultural it naturally follows that domestic events attain a prime importance. Everyone knows the business of the other. Coming domestic events form the subject of much conversation and no little speculation, and as may be imagined, these accusations, supported by testimony, created a profound sensation.

On the day appointed by the Khan for the hearing

of the appeal it seemed that half the countryside had come in to witness the staging of this final scene in a great domestic drama.

On the eve of the case the Khan drew me on one side and asked me if I had prepared a precis. It was more than fifty words in length, yet he read it, nevertheless. He remained silent for a time; then added that he would require my assistance still further.

"You," he said darkly, "shall be an assessor, and assist the court! "

I admit that I had no liking for a task so lightly imposed, for if this domestic wrangling went wrong, and the verdict went to the wrong lady, it would be the unfortunate assessor who would be assailed when he showed his face in the district. In the case of the Khan it was all right. He could do no wrong.

Sitting upon the dais the next morning I felt anything but judicial. The Khan appeared to be taking but the smallest notice of the pleadings, and his manner indicated plainly enough that, as an assessor, the entire case rested upon my unworthy shoulders.

I listened with a sense of supine stupefaction to the shrill declamations and assertions of either side. One young woman, very comely and pleasant, and with eyes roguishly blacked, alternately ogled the court while she gave most intimate details of her confinement and screamed like a virago while she denounced the claims of the other branch of the family. The next young woman, equally pleasant and comely, and also with a fine sense of deportment, was no more bashful. If anything, she sought to outdo her rival by sustaining her case with irrelevant detail.

One thing became clear from the evidence, and one thing only.

Both ladies had given birth to boys.

Yet the court was confronted by a boy and a girl.

I stirred uneasily as the time arrived when the court would have to give its decision, and I glanced more than once at the Khan who viewed the proceedings with complete unconcern, and often with ill-concealed amusement.

Dumbly I awaited the moment when he should approach the assessor for his views on the case, but for once, and quite unwittingly, I had misjudged my employer and the extent of his resource.

When the evidence was complete he stirred himself, and addressed the two contestants.

"I have listened carefully to your statements," he began contumaciously, "but I am quite unable to determine from your evidence as to who is speaking the truth."

He smiled, and lifted his hand to summon some of the court officials.

"Go," he said to them, "and search for goats with kid. Find one with a female kid, and one with a male, and bring them into court."

The attendants departed to do his bidding, and I wondered what the Khan had in his mind. His expression remained inscrutable, however, as we waited.

The attendants had no great difficulty in procuring the requisite animals, and these were led and pushed into court, bleating stupidly.

Naturally their advent created a mild disturbance, but the Khan imperiously demanded silence, and

ordered that the mother goats be milked in full view of the court.

“And be careful to keep the vessels separate,” he added as an afterthought.

Milk in two earthen vessels was brought to the dais, and the Khan sipped at each.

He passed the vessels to me, and ordered me to do likewise.

He addressed the court.

“We all know,” he said, “that milk from a goat with a male kid is stronger than that from a goat with a female. Further to test this knowledge I have held a demonstration. I have tasted of this milk, and so has my assessor. He will give his verdict! ”

The eyes of the courtroom were concentrated upon me while I murmured that the milk from the goat with the male was stronger. A buzz of interest and satisfaction swept round the building as I said so. The simple country folk thus applauding the astuteness of the Khan had yet to learn how he proposed to utilise this theatrical turn in deciding the case of the two ladies, but I had already dawning suspicions. I, of course, knew the Khan. The people within the well of the court only knew what was good for them to know.

The Khan called the appellant—the daughter who swore that her sister-in-law had robbed her of her child.

“Madame,” he said sternly, “you still say that your child was a male? ”

“Huzoor,” she replied, fluttering her eyebrows, “I do! ”

The Khan called the daughter-in-law.

“ You too swear that your child was a boy? ”

“ Huzoor, Protector of the Poor, I do! ” She too was coy, for she had recognised in my employer a susceptible subject.

“ In that case ladies, we must apply our test. You will please remove your bodices! ”

Shrill cries of protest came from the litigants, and there was a rustle of excitement from the body of the court where the spectators had risen to their feet in a body the better to view the proceedings.

In the midst of the cries of the court attendants ordering the people to be seated, I heard the Khan repeat his order. Moreover, he rose from his seat, and proceeded to where the two still wildly protesting ladies were standing.

“ Come, come, ladies,” he chided in feigned anger. “ This is no time for foolishness. You have applied to our supreme court for justice, and you shall have it! ”

Gently he approached the daughter, and notwithstanding her modest wriggings, untied the knot of her single upper garment. Approaching the sister-in-law, he performed a similar service.

He returned to the shrinking daughter, and lowered his head. He placed his mouth to a teat, and sucked. He allowed the human milk to roll slowly over his tongue; then he made for the sister-in-law. She he also mulcted of sustenance, and the court waited breathlessly for the verdict of his palate.

But he was not quite yet done.

“ Everything must be done in a seemly and courtly

manner," he murmured unctuously. "Our assessor shall add the weight of his opinions."

Dumbly I rose from my seat and left the dais, and at the behest of the Khan repeated the performance which he had just given. I know not whether I was expected to give a verdict for to me the milk of both mothers was just something sickly and sweet, but fortunately none was required.

Just when it seemed that the oracle must speak, and truth must be given up, the daughter crashed to the ground, screaming and tearing her hair.

"I only came to court because my husband beat me," she moaned, and no verdict as such was necessary.

The Khan resumed his seat, and reviewed the case.

"The time of the court has been taken up with perjurings," he announced pontifically, "and as you have all seen, not because of the whim of a disappointed mother, but because the poor woman was chastised by an irate husband. The sentence of the court is that the husband be placed in the gaol for seven days. In the meantime, and certainly for this evening, the wives of some of my retainers will comfort this poor woman!"

He rose, and I with him. He maintained his solemn mien until we were well away from the precincts of the court; then he bounded about in his car and slapped his thighs with uncontrollable glee.

"Your face, O assessor," he mocked, "it—it was a picture!" Again he laughed, and he poked me in the ribs.

"What did you think of my verdict?" he demanded.

I shrugged my shoulders. A week's gaol for the

husband was but a minor matter. Without a doubt he would bribe his guards and have a tolerably comfortable holiday, and I said as much.

My employer chuckled, so I guessed that his scheming mind was at work again.

“ But, the woman? ”

“ The woman? ”

“ Yes, my fine assessor. You saw much of her figure but didn't you also see her eyes? ”

I knew the worst.

“ So, she is to be comforted, Your Highness? ”

For answer, the Khan prodded me in the ribs again.

However, the best laid schemes of mice and men. . .

It was perhaps inevitable that there should be more than a little comment on the proceedings in court. We were all accustomed to the unorthodox, but in this particular instance the Khan's methods of dispensing justice had been so spectacular that they provided the sensation of the moment. The palace buzzed with the details of his latest escapade, and in the circumstance it was not remarkable that the affair should have reached the ears of his father.

In any event, the Khan sought me out later that day, and his expression was woe-begone. He had evidently had an uncomfortable hour in the presence of the Prince. He was like a deflated balloon.

“ And what is worse,” he said to me confidentially “ is that I have to get rid of that woman. If the Old Man hears about that there will be ructions! ”

I suggested that she should be allowed to remain quietly where she was until dusk, and that the

arrangements should be made for transporting her, perhaps by car, at least a considerable distance on the road to her home.

The Khan perked up at my suggestion, and I thought I noted a dawning gleam in his eye. However, it was not my place to say anything, and the matter passed from my mind.

That night, I was dressing for dinner when I heard a terrible commotion in the courtyard. A car had pulled up at the steps, and the Khan was at the wheel. The car had evidently done a considerable journey over a dusty road; the signs were unmistakable.

On the steps, addressing his son, was the Prince, and he was shaking with fury.

"I hear," he thundered, "that you have had a common zemindary woman here, and that you took her away in a car!"

The Khan had the grace to look abashed.

"Your Highness, she was one of the litigants in our court to-day. I thought it would be a kindly act to have some of the womenfolk care for her; then I thought it would be better to take her part of her way. . . ."

"A princely act!" The tone was cutting, and the Khan squirmed. I was glad that I was not beside him and was merely looking down on the scene from a window.

The Prince stamped his foot. It was easy to see from where the Khan derived his impetuous bearing. He bit his lip, and his manner was terribly caustic.

"Is it usual for you to remain seated when I address you, young man?"

I saw the Khan gulp, and he clenched the driving wheel more tightly.

"Father!" he faltered.

"Father, indeed! Father to such a son!"

The Prince was really frightening in his rage, and for once the Khan appeared thoroughly abashed; yet he remained seated at the wheel. I found it difficult to understand his conduct for it was stupidly wanton. He could have left the car with the greatest of ease, and with sure knowledge that a chauffeur would presently arrive from the garages, and remove it. Yet, as I have said, he continued to sit, and face his father woodenly.

Suddenly, in the midst of another tirade from his irate father, the Khan acted. He let in his gear and accelerated sharply. He sent the car rocketing away toward the garages, and the Prince was left on the steps of the palace, angrily gesticulating.

I knew that there was a terrible scene between father and son that night, and later I sought out the Khan. On occasions such as this—for fierce quarrels were by no means uncommon—I had found it expedient to seek him out and become the voluntary recipient of his spleen and ill-temper. I had found by experience that this was a lesser evil, and much to be preferred to the treatment I might otherwise expect next morning if the Khan had flown to the bottle for solace.

I tracked the Khan down in one of the smaller lounges in his quarters, and he greeted my entry with a baleful glance. He was striding up and down the room, greatly perturbed.

I allowed him to stalk the carpet, waiting for the

outburst which must presently be directed upon me, but the Khan remained strangely silent. He just strode up and down the room as if I were not there. Eventually, however, he spoke. His opening gambit was characteristic.

“Well, what the Hell do you want?”

I could only muster a poor semblance of a grin, and shrug my shoulders. Apparently, however, he had not desired an answer, for with but the slightest of pauses, he went on:

“There’s been an appalling row!”

“Another, Your Highness?”

He snarled at me in exasperation. “Yes, another, you nit-wit. Don’t pretend that you know nothing about it. I suppose the whole damned palace knows by this time. As we would say at Cambridge, there’s been a real up and downer, and—I’ve been downed.”

“Downed?”

“Yes, I’ve had my marching orders. The Old Man says that I’m to clear out, and at once!”

“But, Your Highness, where will you go?”

“Go? I’ll leave that for you to decide. You can make out some sort of itinerary!”

“But——”

He grinned at my discomforture, and sat down at a desk. He wrote a note, and tossed it to me.

“Here,” he said, “get reservations for a boat—make it Egypt.”

I picked up the paper, and gazed at it. I felt incredibly foolish, and doubtless looked it.

“Am I——?” I hazarded. The Khan cut me short.

“Yes, you are. It seems that I am to be afflicted

by your presence. Get two state cabins, and see to it that yours is as far away from mine as possible! ”

This was all very arbitrary, and, as far as my own private affairs were concerned, extremely inconvenient. I ventured to protest.

“ Your Highness, if only you had not taunted your father when he spoke to you from the steps, this would not have happened.”

He lifted his eyebrows, and screwed up his nose.

“ So you were snooping around too, were you? ”

I ignored the insult, and returned to the attack.

“ If only you had left the car when your father spoke to you this would have been just another row. Now . . . ! ”

I saw the muscles around his lips twitch with amusement. Evidently there was something in the scene which I recalled which touched his always lively sense of humour.

“ So you wondered why I remained seated, and then shot away round to the garages? ” He was now openly grinning.

“ Naturally. It seemed such a small thing to do. If you had got out of the car you might easily have placated the Prince; then—we would not be making plans to go to Egypt.”

“ I had every reason for remaining in that car! ”

The Khan's complete enjoyment of the situation was so obvious, and to my mind, so ill-timed, that I began to lose my temper.

“ I must say, Your Highness, that it was not very obvious! ”

“ No,” he chuckled, “ but it would have been if I'd

got out. I suppose you know that I took the woman a goodly part of her way home? ”

I nodded.

The Khan, his face puckered with amusement, deliberately winked.

“ You thought it a kindly action on my part? ”

“ I thought it a good thing to get the woman out of the way, almost at any cost.” I deemed it best to temporise.

“ You admit that I had not much time? ”

“ I thought that Your Highness had been commendably swift.”

“ Yes, I suppose it was fast work! ” The Khan preened himself, and smiled broadly at the recollection.

Suddenly he rose, and taking my arm, edged me towards the door. “ Go and see about those reservations,” he ordered.

“ And, if you really want to know why I stayed in that car,” he bellowed as I strode down the corridor, “ it was because I hadn’t any trousers on! In my hurry I left them on a milestone—the tenth, I think! ”

I could hear him chuckling at the memory.

With very mixed feelings I went to my office to wrestle with long-distance telephones.

CHAPTER II

BY THE WATERS OF THE NILE

“EFFENDI!”

Idly, the Khan and I had descended the steps from Shepheard’s famous terrace in Cairo; and how well I remember that softly intoned salutation. That single word was to lead us into some strange adventures

So many of you must have heard the same cry, and in exactly the same place. Perchance you have fallen victim to the blandishments of the dragomen. Against your better judgment, perhaps, you have been dragged away to the Mushki or to the lesser Cairene bazaars, there furtively to be shown what a glib guide has presented as the underworld.

That which may be shown to any European is patently superficial. If it is not entirely artificial, and specially staged for the occasion, it is entirely innocuous and synthetic, and merely touches the surface of a vast, slimy pool.

The underworld of the East does not advertise itself. It is not so blatant. Most certainly does it refuse to present itself to the casual inspection of time-killing European tourists.

The world hears so much of the subterranean mysteries of London and Paris, the veiled horrors of Marseilles, and the more blatant abominations of New York. And conversely, the East is almost invariably

presented as a place of riotous colour, and of romance. But seldom is one vouchsafed a glimpse behind this highly scented facade.

This is not because the East does not possess an underworld, but because it is so secretive, so sinister, and so deadly. And the East, even with its multitudinous resources, and its truly amazing methods of invoking death, is nevertheless chary of a dead European, and especially of a dead Briton. Too many prying eyes come to investigate, and it costs so much hard-earned money to placate those who would uncover too much.

No—from the point of view of the Eastern underworld the European is merely a nuisance, and, if he presents himself, merely an interloper to be pleasantly directed elsewhere and to whom all secrets are barred.

Yet the same “Effendi!” which greets all visitors to Cairo, and which means so little to the ordinary tourist, was to prove the password to so much that is usually hidden. That it also almost led to our undoing is perhaps by the way.

That evening in Cairo I knew that we were to pursue the unconventional. That much was evident when the Khan thrust open the communicating door dividing our suites, and revealed himself in the attire of a well-to-do Eastern gentleman. He had discarded the pin-stripe which he had flaunted before the eyes of the Cairene elite that afternoon, and there was impatience in his tone when he bade me slip out of my English suiting and don the more ordinary attire of the bazaar.

And the Khan remained in the doorway to see that

I hurried, smiling maliciously as I tugged at my trousers.

“ We can’t expect to see much if we go out in such trappings! ” He indicated my discarded suit with scorn. He had often spoke disparagingly of the cut, but then I could not afford to expend thirty guineas a time on confections from Savile Row.

With the Khan’s comment I knew the worst. It meant that we should browse around places where no European would dare show his face, or if he did, only as an accepted degenerate who had cut all ties with his own countrymen. The least I could expect was a riotous night of women and revelry; at the worst—well anything.

I must emphasise what has perhaps already become apparent, that I had an employer who had a highly developed taste for the bizarre. Moreover, he had wealth, and the means to satisfy his unusual appetite. And money, when proffered by one who is obviously not one of the prying races, can open most doors in the East.

My one object is to lift the veil for European readers, and perhaps to show them how much is hidden beneath the East’s smiling exterior. Perhaps also, I may startle some Europeans resident in the East, for much that is nefarious is to be found in places much frequented by Europeans. Just the opening of a well-hidden door; the lifting of a screening curtain, and——!

I know of some real Turkish baths, for instance, much patronised by wealthy Europeans, but—that is another story, to be told in its proper place. At the moment we are in Cairo.

"Effendi!" implored the dragoman at the foot of Shepherd's steps.

"Imshi!" roared the Khan, automatically.

"Hashish!" whispered the dragoman, confidentially.

"Where?" rejoined my employer, with a suddenly awakened interest.

Like two ordinary tourists ready for the fleecing, the dragoman conducted us round the corner to where a two-horse carriage was waiting. Here, away from the jostling crowds around Shepherd's entrance, a fierce argument ensued.

"Hashish, you said?" The challenge was like a rapier thrust, and the Egyptian, who had already been counting his easily garnered piastres, looked troubled.

His hand went to a wrinkled forehead beneath a scarlet fez, and he inclined his head in humility.

"Be it so, O father of the poor."

"Think we are poor fellahin?"

This was a shrewd thrust, for the poorer class of Egyptian fellahin habitually smoke a low and adulterated grade of hashish. It has little more effect upon them than beer upon the British working man, and the practice is winked at by the authorities, for it is the cultivators' one form of relaxation.

The dragoman eyed the Khan appraisingly; the men of his pestiferous calling are swift in summing a man up.

"There is hashish and hashish," he agreed, "but the other costs so much money; moreover, there is always a risk . . ."

The Khan silenced the man with a petulant gesture. I am afraid he spat.

"That for risk," he growled, angrily, "and—as for money . . ." He pulled out a roll of notes which made the dragoman's eyes bulge.

With many protestations that he could provide just what the Excellencies demanded, he turned to the half somnolent jehu. That worthy gathered himself, pushed his greasy tarboosh to an even more rakish angle, slashed at his horses with a cruelly knotted whip, tugged viciously at the reins when the startled beasts lunged forward, and opened a face full of yellow teeth.

These preliminaries having been satisfactorily attended to, he consented to admit the presence of the dragoman with whom he immediately went into heated and fiercely whispered conference. A few moments later we were clattering away in the direction of the Citadel.

Presently, after we had been well conned from a window, we were admitted to a house with a most respectable facade. There were cabalistic signs from the dragoman, guttural pleasantries from the carriage driver, and we were in.

It was easy quickly to sum up the type of house to which we had been admitted. Hashish there was, and good hashish, but the trappings, while likely to appeal to the jaded tastes of rich Cairenes, merely made the Khan yawn. To a man who boasted of his "century" in respect to women before attaining the age of sixteen, they were very ordinary.

The pipes were served by young women, principally

Greek, though I observed more than one Spanish woman and several faded French women.

Their attire was brief, and garish, and consisted solely of long black stockings held in place with bejewelled garters. Whether the jewels were synthetic or real I never enquired, for I did not share the Khan's ennui.

Incidentally, who was it who first passed the now universally accepted law that these ladies, no matter in what country they ply their profession, should restrict themselves to *black* stockings? Why not white, red or flesh-coloured? I seem to remember, through the mists of a hectic night, just one rebel who broke the law. It was in Calcutta, and she wore silk stockings of a startling green. But she was stout, and a little passé, and her province was to take money for drinks. The vision is becoming a little clearer. I remember too that she wore a kimono of amazing design. It had been cut by an artist. In front it descended to within two inches of the stockings, but in the rear the artist had allowed full flight to his imagination. The garment swerved upward and then downward in a delirious arc, revealing a naked posterior which had been carefully powdered and tinted. However, the full effect of the revelation was lost, or heightened if you will, by an angry-looking pimple on the left buttock. Moreover, as the lady bustled around with her drinks, pendant breasts swooped dizzily up and down and produced a swishing sound against the silken kimono which I found distressingly monotonous.

But, again I am digressing.

We were on the subject of black stockings in Cairo.

The ladies who so assiduously served one with pipes, debarred by the rules of the establishment from further raiment, had invented a modernistic decor which I found very intriguing. Not only had they enamelled their finger nails and their toe nails in brilliant shades of red, but they had deemed it suitable to secure a contrast by enamelling the nipples of their breasts in colours frantically warring. Thus the young Greek goddess who attended to my wants had toe and finger nails of brilliant carmine while the appendages which I have indicated glared at one in a belligerent mauve. The little sob-sister who attended the Khan had preferred a vivid blue. I saw him blink, and smile appreciatively, before resuming his air of acute boredom.

These were no fallen ladies in the accepted sense of the term. These were no unfortunates who had been wiled into a degrading profession by Marseilles procurers. They were too essentially virile and intent upon their work to be otherwise than enthusiastic full-timers.

They were gold-diggers of the first water, but the Khan suffered the ministrations of his blue-enamelled temptress in silence until, in the midst of a particularly violent embrace in which the enamel gave remarkable evidence of its hard wearing qualities, she attempted to purloin his notebook.

I am afraid that she woefully misjudged her man. Hashish is not necessarily a soporific. Often it can excite the brain, and induce a false sense of power and well-being. Often too it can produce the sense of power without the feeling of well-being.

With a lazy smile, the Khan caught the wandering hand, and held it aloft. Blue Enamel was taken entirely by surprise, for she retained her grip of the notebook, and there it was in the air for all to see.

The Khan, gently and smilingly, removed it from her hand, and replaced it in his pocket. Then, with a dexterous twist, he turned his tormentor across his knee and administered punishment in that most normal of all places with three stinging motions of his palm.

Still smiling, he straightened his knees, and allowed the gasping female to roll incontinently to the floor. Then, with a little characteristic gesture, he rose. He nodded to me.

"Come," he muttered brusquely, "we'll get out of this. I've had enough of this child's play."

We sauntered from the room, and entered the passage which gave egress on to the street.

There had been a dead silence as we left the room of the pipes, and now ahead of us in the passage I saw sundry dark fittings, and I sensed trouble. There was trouble, and it loomed up before us in the shape of four men, unpleasant looking thugs, who barred our progress.

Nothing was said, but the leader employed a gesture which is current in all countries. Its portent was obvious.

Angrily, the Khan cried out that he had already paid—and well, but the hand remained outstretched—menacingly.

The Khan, with a grunt, essayed to push by, and there was a scuffle.

Whatever his other attributes, I have to admit that

my employer never lacked courage ; neither did he lack a knowledge of self-defence and, on occasion, real aggression.

The scuffle was soon a fight, and there were some shrewd blows given and exchanged. If the men had been Arabs from the desert, the tale might have been different, but they were Cairenes, and breathlessly we fought our way outward. We made the street, and at a word from the Khan, and I confess I required no second bidding, we ran, and ran hard.

There was no sign of the dragoman or the jehu, but fortune did not entirely desert us. As we limped along we were overtaken by one those open tourer taxis well-known in Cairo. The chauffeur pulled up, and the driver remarked upon our haste.

The Khan halted, and explained, and I could see the driver eyeing us curiously.

Apparently he well knew the reputation of the place we had just vacated, for he laughed.

"That hole!" He did not attempt to disguise his contempt. "That den is only for such old fools who should know better—old greybeards past their prime who can give a woman no pleasure."

The man's candour was distressing, and his manner eloquent of the fact that he could, if he would, lead us elsewhere where men were men, and otherwise enlarge the orbit of our investigations.

Inwardly, I cursed the fellow's cool presumption, for I had had enough for one night. Moreover, I had taken a crack upon my right shin which was still extremely painful. The Khan, however, leaped upon the implied suggestion as a panther on its kill.

"I am no milk-sop," he suggested.

The taxi-driver considered us, and the situation. Patently, he was weighing us in the balance, and he hesitated before committing himself. As soon as he spoke I realised the reason for his caution, for the drive then being made against dopers and the drug traffickers was at its height.

Apparently, however, we passed muster.

"You went there for hashish?" The chauffeur indicated our recent venue with a nod.

The Khan grunted acquiescence.

"The other—the white powder—is more dangerous. It is also more expensive. Even I do not know where, but," he added artfully, "I know how!"

That was enough for the Khan in his present mood. We entered the taxi, and the driver drove back into Cairo proper. We crossed the Kaisr-i-Nil Bridge, and made slowly along the road to Mena. I questioned in my mind the reason for the man's slow and steady rate of progress, but I said nothing. I noted, however, that as we crossed the bridge, and on several other occasions thereafter, the man sounded his electric horn in a curious sequence of short, staccato blasts. I suppose we had traversed two miles of the road to Mena when I became aware that another car was following us. I drew our driver's attention to it, and he pulled up and alighted.

Glancing backwards, I saw him in short, sharp conclave with the occupant of the car; then he returned, and addressed the Khan. With almost a casual air he mentioned an almost incredible number of piastres, but the Khan paid, and without demur.

We too alighted, and the financial aspect of the affair having been amicably settled, a rotund little gentleman presented himself for our inspection. Obviously, he was a hybrid—half Arab, half Greek. How he had achieved such a mongrelloid mixture I know not; neither did I enquire, though I believe he would have answered any such question obsequiously because he could not have been more deferential in his manner.

He was an oily little man, and I disliked him on sight. For the general safety, he said, we should have to submit to being blindfolded. It was essential, he explained, that none should know too much.

I thought that the Khan would protest, and vigorously, but the hashish had evidently made him light-hearted, for he agreed without a murmur.

We entered the hybrid's car, and I suppose we drove for an hour. By the lurchings of the car I could sense that the route was one of many turnings and, I suspected, largely circular.

Actually, there was a certain futility about these theatrical precautions, for it required no Sherlock Holmes to see, when we eventually arrived at our destination, and the bandages were removed from our eyes, that we were on the banks of the Nile, and were being ushered aboard one of the large houseboats which are such a conspicuous feature of this romantic waterway.

We were quickly shown aboard, and into a small, private compartment. It was early evident that whatever transpired here was without any of the extravagant trappings of the house in Cairo. There was nothing

garish, and there was almost a singular absence of the exotic feminine element. Any gold-digging to be done here would be accompanied by methods more direct.

From the quiet murmur of voices around us it was clear that the houseboat was a well-known rendezvous, and did not lack a clientele.

Small syringes in a cabinet by the wall told their own tale, and I confess that I gazed upon them with some trepidation. I had always entertained a lurking horror of the hypodermic syringe, and I could never submit myself to an inoculation without an inner shudder.

Fortunately, the white-clothed attendant who came smilingly into the apartment asked whether we preferred an injection, or powder with which to sniff. I watched the Khan anxiously, for he had inhaled sufficiently of hashish to make him reckless. I saw him eye the needles, then decide on powder. I was more than pleased because one can always pretend to sniff, whereas an injection is so terribly final.

We were each apportioned a small packet, and I confess that even I, a tyro in such matters, was suspicious. That particularly offensive odour of "snow" was remarkably absent, and we had been palmed off with rubbish so adulterated that the principal constituent was powdered chalk.

In the ordinary course of events I objected to the Khan being swindled, but in this instance any annoyance which might have been mine was tempered by a feeling of relief. I was not so sure of the reactions of the Khan.

Smiling happily, he sniffed; then he let out a roar of anger.

Dashing the powder to the floor, he rushed at the door so recently closed by an obsequious attendant, and found it bolted. For a moment he considered the situation, his features working in fury, then he charged at the door, and battered the panels with his fists. For all the impression he made he might have thrown his weight against the walls of Dartmoor.

He raged around on one leg, for a lusty kick at the lower panels had done more damage to his toe than the woodwork; and he cursed mightily as only a fluent Eastern can curse. He maligned the attendant's mother and grandmother, and had proceeded a considerable distance down a mythical and obscene family tree before he paused for breath. He stopped cursing, and gazed round the apartment, obviously looking for trouble. Being the Khan, he found it.

With a bellow of rage he rushed upon the cabinet containing the syringes, and lifted it bodily. He hurled it at the door. He picked up a chain, and crashed it at the lock.

I could hear the alarmed shouts of the habitués as they listened to the din. Doubtless they thought it a police raid, and were correspondingly disturbed.

Suddenly, the door was thrust open, and there was more menace confronting us. Three buck negroes filled the door-frame, and behind them, hopping grotesquely with excitement, was our little Greek-cum-Arab. Though he led from behind, it was he who had taken command of the situation. He growled at his henchmen, and pummelled them in their capacious backs.

Frankly, in looking back upon this episode from this

distance, I don't think the negroes required any such encouragement, for when they advanced upon us they were grinning broadly. Like big children, they were thoroughly happy with the immediate prospect.

I have but a hazy recollection of what happened thereafter. I saw the Khan hit out, and I did my best to emulate him. Then I found myself struggling in the Nile, and still warding off the attentions of a sadistically inclined negro. Faintly, I remember reaching the bank, still with the negro in unpleasant attendance.

When I came to my senses I know not. My head pained, and there was a great swelling behind my right ear. As the skin was broken I came to the not unnatural conclusion that it had come into contact with some heavy object.

It was broad daylight, and when the pain in my eyes would allow me a glimpse of the sun, I could tell that it was late afternoon. When I eventually rose to my feet, I vomited.

Dazedly, I cast round, and there, some little distance away was the Khan. He was in a much worse condition than I. and it seemed ages before I could make him respond. Incidentally, while I sought to restore him to consciousness, I felt in his pocket. As I had suspected and feared, all his money had gone. Our little hybrid had been thorough in his methods.

There was really but little need to cogitate on our position. When I came to myself, my hands had encountered hard sand. Away in the distance, and projecting their heads above the sky-line, were three

dark shapes. We had been dumped down upon the desert some twelve miles from the Pyramids.

It was a painful, and very acrimonious trudge into Mena, where we were glad to stay the night.

We were assured, by the few to whom we spoke of our experiences, that we had been extraordinarily lucky. Being Easterns, we were fortunate in emerging from the Cairene house so easily, but when we told of our visit to the Nile houseboat, our hearers lifted their hands in horror.

Many of these places, we were assured, had the most evil of reputations, and it had not been unknown for people to disappear after being enticed to these haunts. Even Europeans, we were informed, beguiled by the dark allure of twinkling eyes behind an all too transparent yashmak, had failed again to appear. As our listeners pointed out, the dark waters of the Nile were so handy, and there were many denizens of the water who would accept carrion as a gift sent by the gods.

Disappearance with no trace, was the order.

I can only assume that the anti-drug drive, then in full force, was responsible for our retaining our skins. Our little Greek friend was out to avoid real trouble at all costs, and perhaps he did not trust that taxi-driver overmuch.

We had more than one attempt to trace that houseboat, but success did not attend our efforts.

On one occasion we went down the Nile in a small steamer, and every houseboat we saw we conned through our binoculars. The Khan had even gone into Cairo's most expensive store and purchased night

glasses for use on the homeward journey, but we saw nothing to excite our suspicions.

There was, however, one episode which I still retain vividly in my memory.

Among the passengers on this tiny steamer were a number of unattached Egyptian women. All were young, all were expensively attired, and all spent their time in the most animated conversation.

The Khan, as did many of the other passengers, cast more than one hopeful glance in their direction, yet they remained curiously aloof.

The Khan, worldly wise as he was, was intrigued, and I saw him muttering to himself when continually rebuffed. There was both disdain and insult in the supercilious manner in which these ladies regarded any oncoming male—a suggestion which made the Khan the more furious because, having read the signs, he took the rebuffs personally. It was as if the ordinary man was placed beyond the pale, not because of any excess of virtue, but because he was merely unworthy. And, the Khan had the highest opinion of his capabilities.

As night fell the steamer pulled up at one of its frequent halts, and if anything the animation among the ladies became more pronounced.

They pressed to the rail as the diminutive gangway was let down, and they surveyed the flat, shadowy countryside with much more interest than it warranted.

With much less interest I too gazed into the gathering darkness, and there I saw, sitting in line, seven or eight swarthy men. When I say "sitting," I of course really mean squatting in the Eastern fashion, feet flat

upon the ground, and the weight of the body taken on the fully-bended knees.

The men were naked—no very remarkable occurrence on the banks of the Nile or in the vicinity of the Suez Canal, but one could not but be struck by their magnificent physique. Squatting there, statuesque, they made a magnificent picture of male strength, and the reason for the ladies' disdain of anything that the boat could offer in masculine companionship began to dawn upon me.

I put my glasses to my eyes, for though the moon was now shedding its lustre over the landscape, there were occasional clouds. I gasped.

I had long known that the men of this land were mightily developed—I do not mean the miserable specimens to be found in the towns and cities—but I was not prepared for what came so glaringly to the eye.

Not so the ladies on the boat. They had fallen into a profound silence. Obviously, they had much on their minds; and it did not require glasses to catch the glint in their eyes.

Presently, as from a signal, the men rose, and they pranced in a species of dance. Although they were naked, it was by no means obscene; rather was it meant to emphasise the symmetry of masculine muscular development. Other aspects of the scene required no such emphasis.

The dance proceeded for perhaps a quarter of an hour; then, as a kind of finale, the men stood motionless, their arms raised high in the air.

Now, completely oblivious of those around them, and their eyes alight with ill-controlled passion, our disdain-

ful ladies trooped down the gangway and ran toward those uplifted arms.

I stood there, transfixed with astonishment, and saw each one seize unto herself a man.

The clouds came, and obscured the moon, which was perhaps just as well.

The Khan, armed with his night-glasses, remained at the rail.

Even now I can hear him spluttering, and chuckling.

CHAPTER III

PORT SAID NIGHTS

NOTWITHSTANDING his free Nile entertainment, the Khan could not eradicate from his mind his previous maltreatment, and he declared himself disgusted with Egypt. He considered that its hospitality had been of a remarkably mixed kind, and he said that he would leave. However, I was not unrelieved when eventually we boarded our boat at Port Said. Perhaps I was too sanguine, nevertheless. Perhaps it was Kismet.

We were on deck with just an hour or two before the ship sailed, and we idly watched the scene ashore. Anchored near us was a Japanese boat, attended, as were we, with a score or more bum-boats whose raucous-voiced occupants, in accordance with time-honoured custom, sent their wares aloft with the aid of strings attached to baskets.

Anyone who has stood off Port Said in a ship knows how these men importune; how the word "No" is the least understood in their very extensive vocabularies, and how thoroughly annoying and vexatious they can be. They are a thorough nuisance in that one can seldom go below to escape their attentions, for all port-holes have to be closed in an effort to limit the thieving propensities of these gentlemen. More often than not the atmosphere below is stifling, and the only places at all habitable are the decks.

Standing there, endeavouring to ignore the blandishments of the mendicants and the guli-guli men, I saw the Khan stiffen. Quietly, he motioned me to the shadow of a lifeboat; then he pointed.

There upon the shore was our hybrid of the Nile houseboat, and his attention was focussed upon the liner, the nationality of which need not be mentioned. We went aft, to secure a clearer field of vision, and we saw two bum-boats laden with fruit standing off the liner's fo'castle. That in itself was not remarkable, but it was sufficiently noteworthy, for ordinarily Oriental fo'castle hands have not the means to buy indiscriminately from the bum-boatmen, and these bum-boatmen displayed no disposition to depart from what was evidently a centre of good trading.

What intrigued me more than the bum-boatmen was the intrepidity displayed by the oily little ruffian ashore. He was in full view from our liner, and his actions were not in the least furtive.

The situation was interesting to say the least, and we continued to watch. We saw the bum-boatmen push off from the steel sides of the boat. Their crazy vessels were still well stocked with wares, but they made no effort to enhance their trade by muscling-in among the vendors still circling our ship. Instead, they pulled slowly and lethargically, and without the slightest appearance of haste, in the direction of the Canal. We watched their sweeps churning the noisome yellow waters as they avoided the pontoon jetty which connected us with the shore, and then the Khan acted.

He was ever impetuous. He muttered an oath, and striding away, curtly bade me follow him. He made

for the companion-way, and edging aside a scandalised ship's officer on duty at its head, rushed down headlong. We made all haste ashore, and were just in time to observe our hybrid entering a taxi. We tumbled into another of the several waiting to convey passengers to the Exchange and to Simon Artz, and followed.

It was a roundabout drive, but at the entrance of a dingy galli, or lane, on the outskirts of the port, our quarry alighted. Bidding our driver halt and wait, the Khan, with me as a rather unenthusiastic follower, plunged down the unsavoury thoroughfare. We watched our man enter one of the many hovels bordering each side of the lane.

We decided to watch events, and to wait, but it was not for long.

Soon we saw the two bum-boatmen, ostensibly returning to their homes with their baskets of unsold fruit, and it was the Khan who supplied the key to the situation.

"That," he remarked quietly, "is the way they smuggle cocaine into the country. What now?"

The Khan was right, for we were later informed by the police that the desert patrols had largely broken up the contraband caravan traffic from the desert, and that the traffickers were then concentrating upon the ports of Port Said and Alexandria. Agents, shipped as members of the crew of questionable boats, handled the stuff, and we had seen a pretty exhibition of the manner in which cocaine was smuggled into the country. It was impudently open, amazingly simple, and provided the bum-boatmen played their part without attracting attention, astonishingly safe.

When the Khan made his revelation I remained silent. If I had had my way I would have suggested an immediate retreat to the boat. The neighbourhood was decidedly unsavoury, and even though Port Said has been largely cleaned up since the War, it still retains sufficient of its old terrible associations to make it desirable to proceed warily when off the beaten track.

I reflected, and decided in my own mind that this was really none of our business. What had occurred in the Nile houseboat we had largely asked for, and the loss of a wallet, no matter how well filled, meant little to a man with the resources of the Khan.

With my employer, however, this episode rankled. Like many men with money he would give openly-handedly on occasion, but nothing riled him more than the thought of being "done."

"We will inform the police," he muttered vindictively, but we didn't.

There were more eyes to those hovels than we had suspected, and even as we turned to go we were assailed.

The street became alive with flying forms, and the remarkable silence with which they emerged from those mean houses was in itself redolent of pre-conceived action and sinister purpose.

I received a kick in the groin which gives me occasional twinges to this day, and the Khan received a slash on the arm from which the blood poured prodigiously. Soon afterwards I collected a crack over the head from some unseen assailant which rendered me completely *hors de combat*.

I came to my senses in a motor-car. There was a screaming, milling mob around me, and a number of policemen, lustily applying their batons, were endeavouring to maintain some form of order.

Dazedly, I realised that the Khan was at my side. His head was lolling grotesquely, and he was unconscious.

The car in which I reclined lacked a driver.

It was many minutes before I could answer questions, or comprehend the statements of the police.

Apparently, our taxi-driver, who we had required to wait, had been the real hero of the occasion.

He had watched us enter that lane with considerable trepidation and anxiety. He was a licensed man, and doubtless there had been those who had observed us enter his vehicle by the waterfront. He had a considerable sense of responsibility in our well-being, and he desired more than anything else to remain on the right side of the police.

When the alley had spued forth its army of cut-throats he had made off at full speed, and informed the police. The fact that we were wearing ordinary European clothing impelled the police to act with promptitude, and this fact had saved us.

The police had arrived on the scene just as a car had shot out of the galli bearing two badly-maltreated Paul-pries. What our intended destination was to have been we never discovered, for the moment the police stopped the car the driver ran like a hare and disappeared in the labyrinth of alleys surrounding the neighbourhood.

The police were careful to assure us, however, that

we had been booked for a destination to which no return ticket is issued. And we knew that the desert jackals make efficient scavengers.

Perhaps it goes without saying that we did not catch our boat. The police, anxious to question us further, made us more or less comfortable in the Exchange Hotel, while they required the Khan to sign a requisition which would safely see our luggage off-board.

Thus it was that Fate decreed that we should spend some further time in this unsavoury port.

Once we had made it apparent to the police that we had told them all, and once they had disposed of the suspicion that we were members of a rival dope gang at enmity with those who had so savagely attacked us, they had little further use for us. True, they suggested that the Khan should curb his inquisitiveness, and thus save them the trouble of extricating him from further trouble, but the warning fell on deaf ears.

Even that night we were in another establishment of doubtful morals. I knew that the Khan would treat the women cavalierly, for he had no time for a sitting bird and preferred to take them on the wing. I wondered, therefore, why he should take the trouble to visit a place so very ordinary.

It was merely one of those establishments to be found in ports the world over, which cater for the seaman with money, the less selective tourist, and those who by entering such places engender that prickly feeling down the spine which comes to all innocents when they believe that they are rubbing shoulders with the underworld. Actually the place was run with the full cognisance of the police and, as far as the owners and

other inhabitants were concerned, was conducted with almost as much seemliness as a seminary. What went on in the many tawdry bedrooms was a commercial transaction to be entered up in the books of the establishment as would be any other item of trade.

The "girls" there received a percentage of their takings, and of course, their keep. And "Madame" saw to it that she was the custodian of all money that passed.

With an ingratiating smile, she would approach a client before he disappeared to the bedchamber, and suggest that it would be better for the good name of her salon if he paid his "fee" there and then, and placed the remainder of his valuables in a locker, the key to which she provided.

She would explain to newcomers that she made this a rule in order that there could never be any suggestion that clients were robbed in bedrooms.

Actually this rule gave the place a name for fairness and security, and "Madame" never lacked a clientele. Nevertheless, an establishment run on such strictly commercial lines could be little more than a colourless brothel. Actually, except in name, it never aspired to be anything else.

Yet, even behind this eminently "respectable" place of assignment there was something. True, it was a very little something, and when compared with much that can be found behind the scenes, a not very important something. However, the Khan, in his round-about way had heard of it, and its very crudity appealed to his curious sense of humour.

That is why we went.

We were received in the saloon by "Madame" in the ordinary course of business, and she looked doubtful when she was approached by the Khan. The transfer of several hundred piastre notes, however, settled the question.

When the salon was clear of other clients "Madame" beckoned us, and we proceeded upstairs. She ushered us into a room and showed us a mirror. It was just an ordinary mirror placed over an occasional table, and I was not greatly interested.

Taking a key from her girdle, she opened the communicating door leading into the next room, and then the real nature of the mirror became apparent. In the room we had just vacated it actually served the purpose of a mirror. In the one we had just entered it was no more than a window which gave a full view of the interior of the other room.

Bidding us remain quiet, "Madame" left us, and carefully locked the communicating door.

Ten minutes or so later, we saw a man enter the room next door. He was accompanied by one of the "girls" of the house.

I admit that I was intrigued, and I stood with the Khan close to the pseudo mirror, waiting developments.

The Khan giggled softly, the situation appealing to him, and the man in the next room looked up. He was a husky seaman of the better class, and he was more than a little intoxicated. Moreover, he had an ominous bulge in his hip pocket.

He rose from the sofa on which he had been sitting, and strode over to the "mirror." As he did so, he tugged at his pocket, and flourished a revolver. I

willed myself to believe that we could see, and he could not, but I could not help wondering if there was not some further trick to the glass and that we had not gone unobserved after all.

In any case, there was the man advancing with a revolver in his hand; his expression appeared determined enough, and it was a bad moment.

I was relieved, and I think the Khan was too, when the seaman merely tossed his gun on to the occasional table beneath the mirror—a table which, incidentally, we could not see from our point of vantage.

I will draw a veil over the subsequent proceedings. It is sufficient to say that the Khan was thoroughly pleased, and convinced that he had received his money's worth.

For some reason the Khan evinced considerable anxiety to spend a night in the desert. At first I believed that it was born of a desire to be rid, momentarily at least, of the close atmosphere of town life. King Feisul, I reasoned, often left his palace at Baghdad and rode into the desert for peace and seclusion. The Khan, however, did not hanker after seclusion.

He had heard that weird rites were sometimes performed in the desert beyond Port Said, and he was all agog to be taken behind the scenes. Any interest I might have had in the proceedings speedily evaporated when I learned that these rites were principally concerned in the admittance of persons to the Muslim Faith, but the Khan retained his enthusiasm, and that, of course, meant that we went.

We rode into the desert some twenty miles on fast

trotting camels until we came to a Bedouin encampment. There a number of persons beside the Bedouins had assembled, and among them I saw a white man. I regarded his presence with considerable surprise, and the more so when I was told by the Khan that this was the "initiate."

It was easy to tell from the man's diction that he was an American, and I summed him up as a man of considerable wealth, but with a distinct leaning towards sensuality. His lips told a tale of their own, and his eyes added confirmation.

I put him down as a pervert who had decided to embrace Islam for the thrill to be derived from an initiation, and not for any spiritual uplift which might accompany his change of faith.

Evidently there were those at the encampment who believed similarly, for the so-called initiation, when it eventually commenced, was a mere mumbo-jumbo of words, and had not the slightest relation to the sonorous phrases enjoined by the Koran.

I looked on with some disgust until I realised that the man was made to be deceived, for I have strong views on religion, and do not care to see it made the butt of the buffoon.

Here, however, was someone whom it was never intended to admit to Islam, and it was not long before I too was laughing in my handkerchief at the absurd figure the man struck.

He repeated meaningless and even foolish phrases with all the decorum of a bishop, to the huge delight of the assembled Bedouins, and the almost complete collapse of the Khan.

Such absurdity could not continue indefinitely, but it was obvious from the sustained interest of the "congregation" that the *pièce de resistance* was yet to come.

To the ignorant, I suppose that the ceremony might have appeared almost impressive. The still desert air lent atmosphere to the occasion, and the ruffian who took the part of the Maulvi could have made legitimate money elsewhere as an actor.

He stood before the American and we squatted round in a ring. There was a moon to light the occasion, and additional illumination came from the smoky, tallow-fired lamps of the Bedouins. Occasionally a camel would gurgle from behind the Bedouin encampment, and in the far distance there came frequently the cry of jackals.

When the mumbo-jumbo had proceeded far enough, the "Maulvi" leaned toward his victim, and spoke in English. What passed was said confidentially, but in that desert air we all could hear.

"Remove your shirt and trousers," whispered the "Maulvi."

For the first time the American appeared disconcerted. He sought to protest, but the "Maulvi lifted a forbidding arm, and in the gravest possible tones repeated his request.

With more than one side-glance at the squatting circle, the man slowly, and with a complete absence of nerve, commenced to disrobe. In the end he stood forth in the moonlight, a tall white figure with a protruding stomach, and shoulders that sloped supinely forward.

"Repeat this after me," enjoined the Maulvi, and the unhappy man was required to declare, in words of which he had not the slightest comprehension, that having proceeded so far in the Muslim "initiation," he desired to go further, and be received within the fold.

Having declaimed as much the "Maulvi" gave him some slight inkling of the meaning of his request, then held up his hand as a signal.

From the encampment four men issued, and slowly, and with an absurd assumption of dignity, they took up places each side of the "Maulvi."

At a word from him, two seized the American by the arms while a third brandished a rusty instrument something akin to a crude pair of scissors.

The man shrieked and yelled, but the men who had seized him were adepts at their task, and held him well.

Within a remarkably few moments, the American had been circumcised, and in full view of us all.

The operation over, the fourth men applied some rude antiseptic which made the "initiate" leap with agony.

I glanced at the Khan. During the actual operation he wore that tense look which had been there when he viewed the death agonies of the bear and the leopard. He was then definitely sadistic, and he was relishing every moment of the scene. He could sense and appreciate the white man's acute sense of humiliation, and he revelled in every grimace; in every shriek of abjuration.

When that stinging dressing was applied, and the

man gyrated in agony, the Khan wept with laughter. He had thoroughly enjoyed his evening.

We waited, talking one with another, while the distraught man blindly hunted around the desert sands for his clothes.

In the interim the Bedouin camp was struck with miraculous rapidity, and all that could be seen was a line of camels disappearing behind the sand dunes.

We, for our part, mounted our trotting camels.

I asked what was to happen to the unfortunate man.

The Khan laughed, and pointed to a dispirited donkey tethered close to the still vainly-searching man.

"After all," he said, not unkindly, "it is only a little more than twenty miles! "

CHAPTER IV

THE LAND OF THE TWILIGHT MEN

THERE was a thin, silken gossamer haze, lazily floating over the Sea of Marmora.

Towards the distance, luxuriantly shimmering in the Eastern sunlight, were low-lying hills. Here and there came a glint of gold as the sun's rays caught and reflected the glory of some mushroom-topped mosque. Tall, and dazzlingly white, and as sentinels looking out upon these waters of destiny and centuries of romance and tragedy, were slender minarets, symbolical of the Crescent, and its vast fields of wasted power.

But a few years ago this was Constantinople, the capital of the mighty Ottoman Empire, and the home of the Sultans and the Caliphs. It was the centre, the very hub, of the great Mohammedan world; it was known as the City of Enchantment, and as the Diamond of the Orient.

Now! Well—it is merely Istanbul, secondary in importance to the newly-created Ankara, and the world-famous, bejewelled palaces of the Sultans are public museums. The last of the Ottoman Caliphs has gone. With a few treasures hurriedly screwed together in an ordinary newspaper, he fled into the night and sought sanctuary upon a British man-o'-war.

Out here, off Seraglio Point, the flashing waters hide so much. No more—at least so the world must hope—

will these waters be the scene of so much stark tragedy, for down below, beneath the now slowly-moving ship's keel, are the bones of countless women.

Here it was that three hundred girls from the one-time royal palaces behind the trees, were drowned by the Sultan Ibrahim. After one of his many debauches he thought it would be amusing completely to decimate his harem, just for the pleasure of recruiting a new one.

Three hundred tearful women, the most beautiful to be found in Sicily and Circassia, were quietly shepherded by their Aghas to the Bostanji-bashi, whose task it was to prepare them for their strange death. The Bostanji-bashi was a court official specially retained for disposing of unwanted harem women, and he had a technique of his own, and one hallowed by centuries. Each unfortunate woman was placed in a sack which had already received its complement of stones, and there was something terribly tedious and prolonged in the lengthy procedure of death dealing. Once in her shroud of sacking the woman was placed in a small boat, and towed out over the waters by another. When beyond Seraglio Point, the Bostanji, working under the vigilant eyes of a eunuch whose sole duty it was to record the death and report it to the Sultan, tugged at his towing rope, and precipitated his victim into the water.

If one knows something of the dreadful history of Seraglio Hill one senses an atmosphere as soon as one enters the ancient capital of the Caliphs; yet, later, as I traversed the Galata Bridge which connects the modern city with the old, the scene which unfolded

itself before my eyes reminded me somewhat of America.

Turkey—the modern Turkey—has changed.

Once it was, and but a few years ago, when the famous berries of Fez dyed the headgear of every Turkish Believer; there was easy, flowing raiment; the curled Turkish slipper fell noiselessly upon the cobbled stones of the winding bazaars; there was a cadence in the light, silvery footsteps of the veiled women—women who despite the yashmak still contrived sometimes roguishly to ogle with provoking, darkly-sparkling eyes.

There, but a very few years ago, on the Holy Friday of each week, the Sultan rode in State to the Mosque; and there was colour; there was pageantry.

Before the War scarlet-clad lancers, mounted upon some of the highest horses in the world, swept majestically along before the royal carriage. The people bent their heads in salutation; not so much to the Sultan, but to the dual personality, the Caliph of all Mohammedans.

Now, most of this pageantry has gone, and there is the law of the Ghazi. He has decreed that the fez is an emblem of servitude and national weakness; and the Crescent, which once adorned the fez, has gone also with the last of the Caliphs. Turkey is no longer a nation which absorbs its strength primarily from religion. The fez has given way to the bowler and the Homburg, and the flowing garments have gone to make room for the reach-me-down. To an astonishing extent the yashmak has disappeared, and the Turkish damsel now trips through the streets to the store and the office,

much as do her sisters in London and New York. She has grown in stature too—to the extent provided by the high heels of Paris. However, she has yet to become hat conscious.

If she has come from behind the shelter of the yashmak, and has adopted the coat and skirt, millinery shops quickly go bankrupt in modern Istanbul. The women tie their hair in a multi-coloured veil, and leave it at that. When they discover the mental satisfaction, and the immense solace, to be derived from Western millinery confections, perhaps the Turk will think longingly of the yashmak. This, after all, was comparatively inexpensive.

And the men too have trouble with their headgear. The Western cap is now the symbol of modern Turkey, and its peak provides a constant source of worry. Centuries of fez-wearing have made a peak superfluous, and the Turk fidgets with it as does an irritable man with a jagging tooth. More often than not he seeks to hide the peak from his offended gaze. He droops it over his ear, and when the peak incommodes that organ, he pushes it round on to the nape of his neck.

All this is in the new city. Go into the old, and one finds the atmosphere a little more redolent of the Arabian Nights. The Ancient is at grips with the Modern, and the battle is not yet won.

Upon the hill are the kiosks of the ancient palace. Rows of cypress trees indicate the way into the inner serai. The trees, silent reminders of an age-long pageantry, lead directly to the Gate of Felicity where, standing in the portico, the courtiers were wont to kiss the hand of their Sultan.

Even now, after an absence of years, one approaches this labyrinth which was the Seraglio with a certain inner trepidation. Even now there are many rooms which are not yet open even to favoured visitors, and an air of mystery hangs over the whole. The very walls radiate atmosphere; and if one has any feeling at all one can sense the scenes of bliss and horror which the stones reflect. The dramas enacted there were too real, too intense, too gripping and too vibrant for the easy dissipation of their reactions.

There are the watch-holes where the black-visaged eunuchs kept ceaseless vigil. There are dark and diverse passages which lead to a maze of buildings. In the distance is the notorious Cage where Sultans kept their brothers in confinement lest they should seek to grasp power. In the cage the bowstring often went to its deadly work, and those in line of succession to the throne never opened their doors without the fear that the bowstring eunuch was there to strangle them.

The Harem itself—a fantastic collection of large and small rooms, many still furnished with costly divans and tiny inlaid tables. The doors are of mother of pearl and of ivory and are exquisitely worked. Baths and tanks are everywhere, but the fountains which once gave a silvery cascade are now silent. This was the home of hundreds of beautiful women. The majority fought and intrigued among themselves for the means and the mere chance to bring themselves before the notice of their Royal Master. Could they but crawl into his bed—I use the word “crawl” advisedly—they at once knew of the sweet things of this life. Others, defeated in the chase, ate of ground glass and of the

poisonous herbs of the desert rather than remain condemned to a life into which no man might enter.

With the Khan, I was gazing intently at some bastinado boards to which the feet of delinquent harem women were tied in the not so distant past, and I was ruminating on all the chastisements those insignificant pieces of wood had seen. Having had my mild thrill, I stepped backwards to view something else, and in so doing trod upon the foot of one who had been gazing as intently as I: It was a pure accident, and hastily I turned to offer my apologies. I found myself confronted by an aged negro of grotesque proportions, and he cursed my clumsiness mightily and with astonishing invective.

I gazed, appalled at the man's grossness, and I listened, fascinated at his diction.

He was old, yet he spoke in a quavering falsetto.

Delightedly, the Khan leaned in my direction, and whispered the word, "Castrated!"

The eunuch—for he was indeed one—peered at us shortsightedly. He was angry that I should so have maltreated his swollen person. I gathered that his dignity had been offended rather more than his bloated body.

Interested, and vastly intrigued with this strange creature, I listened to the tirade without making any response.

I was the more amazed, therefore, when he suddenly ceased his quaverings, and gazed around him—somewhat wildly, I thought. Without another word he ambled away to a quiet corner. I saw him fumble in his hat, and produces something from it.

He then ambled back in our direction. He looked at us as he passed, but there was no recognition in his eyes. He had completely forgotten the incident of a few moments ago, and would have left us as perfect strangers with whom he had never exchanged a word in his life.

This, I was to find, was characteristic among these eunuchs—a disposition toward strange losses of memory, usually only temporary.

The Khan was not disposed to allow this strange old man to walk out of our life so unconcernedly, and we followed. We saw him enter a café, and we did the same. We engaged the attendant in conversation, and were informed that the old eunuch was a frequent visitor. Eventually it was the café proprietor who arranged an introduction, and while we were in Istanbul we got to know him well.

He had been a eunuch in the Yildiz Palace during the time of the Sultans, and when there came the revolution, he deemed himself too old to go elsewhere. He was a man of considerable wealth—all the harem eunuchs were—and he could afford to maintain some standards of luxury.

Often he would return to the seraglio of old, and there dream of the years spent within the many walls of the Yildiz. Often I intended to ask him about those bastinado boards, but the old man still retained a curious sex obsession, and our frequent talks almost invariably turned on eunuchs, and their peculiar reactions to their shorn state.

In the case of this man there had developed a mis-

shapen, swollen body, and curiously enough, a sex urge which had remained with the years. Perhaps this was because, although frequently excited, there had never been a single instance of satisfaction.

The old man was quite open and frank in respect to this—almost too vividly so on occasion—and he explained that he retained his sexual promptings because he had been castrated after puberty.

He was a curious man in many ways. Sometimes he would greet the Khan and myself as if we were honouring him with our friendship. Nothing could be too good for us; on other occasions he would be in the ugliest of moods, and would barely deign to notice us. When he spoke, which was rarely, he snarled, and instead of being almost childishly pleased with our company, he would treat even the Khan with a superb arrogance.

Once I asked him why he was so changeable, and he said that all eunuchs were prone to wide extremes of temperament. Some days, he explained, he would have a sense of great elation in that he, an Abyssinian of the poorest family, should have spent a life in the lap of the most outrageous luxury, and should still be a comparatively rich man, while others were poor. With that elation went a seething, inner pleasure in the thought that he had more than others, and it was really this live satisfaction in the mortification of others that fed the elation. Even in this mood there were two widely differing characteristics.

At other times, he said, he suffered from a blind, unreasoning hate of all mankind. His agony of mind was really distressing as he lived again his days among

the women of the harem, and with continually whetted desires which could not be satisfied.

The Sultans, he was careful to point out, took particular care to see that their eunuchs of the harem were really eunuchs. Notwithstanding the finality of the operation to which they were subjected, they were examined at periodical intervals just to make certain.

As our old eunuch had gone bald, it was safe to say that he had not a single hair upon his body; yet curiously enough he retained almost a perverted fascination for the false curls which hung down from his hat during the years he was in the harem.

He was very proud of these; almost vain in fact, for their official designation was "chastity curls," and they were a badge of office. They showed to all and sundry that it was this eunuch's duty to accompany the ladies of the seraglio to their bath, and to assist in their ablutions; and the curls were fashioned in the mistaken belief that they would hinder him from too appreciative a view of his charges.

He would display these emblems of office to the Khan and myself with great glee, and he would giggle like a sentimental schoolboy. I am certain that in his younger days, had he not suffered the ministrations of the surgeon, he would have been a wicked rascal.

Notwithstanding his curious and occasional lapses of memory, this old man could remember much of the years ago with an amazing clarity. Particularly could he recall the ceremony which reduced him to a twilight man, and he suffered not the least embarrassment when he described the process.

Terrible though it was, he deemed himself fortunate.

He had been taken from Abyssinia by the Nile route, and on the way many boys were operated on in the most casual and haphazard way. At the various halts the man responsible for these operations would decide that there was yet enough daylight to enable him to deprive half a dozen or more youths of their birth-right, and the unfortunates would then be rounded up. There was a complete absence of preparation, absolutely nothing of hygiene, and the only antiseptic the sand of the desert, which was applied to the wounded parts with a complete disregard of surgical practice. Consequently, many boys died *en route*, and never reached Constantinople.

Our eunuch was one of those who reached the Turkish capital entire, and by that time he had reached puberty. In his case, therefore, the operation was attended with more care, and incidentally, he suffered considerable more pain.

The old man went out of his way—and indeed the whole tenor of his conversation gave remarkable testimony to the fact—to deny that his state had any lessening effect upon his desires. If anything, he became more keenly aware of the attraction of the opposite sex, and he suffered extreme mental perturbation through the years as a consequence.

He added that the women of the harem were keenly alive to this abnormality, and that some, especially when piqued, played maliciously upon this knowledge.

Often, he affirmed, he suffered the torments of Hell when some sadistically-inclined temptress wantonly displayed her charms with provocative abandon in the knowledge that she was not only offering the cruellest

torment which a woman could proffer, but was amazingly immune from any sexual reprisals.

He confirmed, too, something which I had always wanted to know in regard to the Turkish Royal harems, and that was the manner of selectivity. Here, of course, I am referring not to those women already in the Royal favour, but to the would-be *kadins*, or concubines. Many of the girls were introduced into the harem at a very early age, and all were required to undergo a period of initiation during which they performed light tasks in connection with the palace. It followed, therefore, that the Sultan would have been unaware of the presence of many, for the girls were recruited by an official of the entourage whose emoluments depended upon his taste, and appreciation of the Royal requirements.

Great then were the occasions when the Sultan paid a visit to the women's quarters, for that was the time to catch the Royal eye and to qualify as a *kadin*. Should the Sultan find a prospect sufficiently pleasing, he would not comment upon the fact, being fully aware that his every movement was being carefully and anxiously watched by many pairs of bright eyes; instead, said the eunuch, he would maintain the conversation of the moment, and just prior to departure would drop his handkerchief at the feet of the girl to be honoured. She would swoop upon the scented cambric, for to her it was to be a talisman, and if she proved sufficiently seductive, the key to luxurious quarters and beautiful raiment.

On the departure of the Sultan, the girl would be whisked away to the baths, where she would undergo

an elaborate toilet lasting many hours. She would be bathed in scented waters, her finger and toe-nails would be pared and tinted, her hair would be shampooed and fashioned, and she herself, under the gaze of wisely critical eyes, would add those further touches to her make-up considered requisite for so important an occasion. Particularly would she apply a special ointment, used by Turkish women for centuries, for the removal of unwanted hair, for with the single exception of the head, Turkish custom in every class of society decrees that a woman shall be hairless.

So much for the question of selection; but there was more I wanted to know, and the eunuch obliged me. Not so many years ago he would have been beheaded for even whispering a single detail; now he took a senile pleasure in breaking injunctions which for nearly a lifetime the fear of the headsman's scimitar had forced him to obey.

Principally, I wanted to know something of etiquette and deportment in respect to the initiation of *kadins*, and the old man was very informative.

There was, for instance, the very considerable interval between the indication of the Royal pleasure, and its possible consummation. The Sultan would depart to his own quarters, engage possibly in State business, and later, in the delights of his table, might forget his action of some hours before, or even change his mind. Even though these Sultans had appetites which were seemingly insatiable, it is not to be supposed that they could regard the incursion of yet another new female into their bedchamber as anything beyond a normal routine. It followed, therefore, that the *kadin*-

elect could not just leave her sumptuous toilet, proceed from the women's quarters, and make herself at home within the Sultan's bedchamber. Obviously there must be some rule or custom in such matters, and I was anxious to know.

It seemed that there was.

As soon as the Sultan indicated a desire to retire for the night, word of his intentions was immediately conveyed to the anxiously-waiting girl and her attendants. She was hurried through the corridors to an ante-room, where it was strictly etiquette for her to remain until her Royal master had disrobed, and had entered his bed. Not until then would she be allowed to obey the summons of the morning.

Etiquette also covered much of the subsequent proceedings.

On entering the bedchamber it was incumbent upon her to curtsy ceremoniously, and with full obeisance. If she could project allure and the appeal of her sex into this courtly ceremonial, so much the better.

Then slowly, and still ceremoniously, she would disrobe, and moreover, still at the foot of the bed. Her place was there by rule, and custom, and it was not until her perfumed body was devoid of its nuptial raiment, that she could seek to move beyond that orbit.

Again, custom and etiquette had prescribed the manner.

She had to perform the ceremony of creeping up the bed.

As a preliminary, she was required to lift the silken coverlet, and raise it to her lips and kiss it, reverently. Thus, having given an outward and visible sign of her

appreciation of the high honour being bestowed upon her, she would insinuate her head dutifully beneath it, and humbly enter the Royal bed from the foot. Slowly, and with the ceremony of kissing many times repeated during her progress, she would gradually work her way upwards until her head projected beyond the other end of the coverlet, and she was level with her Royal lover.

This then, was the ceremony of creeping.

During the night a eunuch would remain outside the bedchamber at instant call. Within, beside the occupants of the Royal bed, were invariably four women of mature years, specially selected for their powers of silent movement, and their faculty of losing themselves within the draperies of the apartment, and otherwise making themselves inconspicuous.

They had various duties, and their final task was to awaken the girl before dawn—always assuming that she slept after her experiences in a strange environment—and return her to whence she came. It was customary for the newly-fledged *kadin* thus to be removed before the Sultan awoke. Perhaps the rule had been engendered in the disappointment sometimes occasioned when viewing a head upon the adjacent pillow in the full light of the morning.

A girl who had successfully employed her charms, and was accepted as a *kadin*, only returned to her old quarters to be immediately removed to others. She was entitled to her own suite, her own servants, considerable jewellery, and the widest choice of the finest raiment.

Our eunuch told me that it was on occasions such

as this, when he was crouching outside the Royal bed-chamber alone with his thoughts, that he suffered his worst sexual pangs. Then he was enraged with his lot, and he was consumed with a despair almost unendurable.

Other occasions were when he attended the ladies at their bath. There was one girl in particular, he said, for whom he had conceived a great affection. With the acute perception of her sex, she had been quick to sense this, and, rogue that she was, she played a thousand and one tricks upon him to whet that outrageously submerged appetite.

I give much of this in order that one might be able to understand the mentality of this remarkable old man. Without this background it would be impossible to appreciate the twist in his mind, and that which enabled him to offer up adulation for the sex on the one hand, while being consumed with a fierce and undying hatred on the other. As he was a man with a dual temperament, so was he a man of dual reactions.

He could appreciate feminine beauty, and still revel in its rounded nakedness; yet his inner appreciation would be surrounded by a bubbling animosity which could be fired into a fiercely-spurting venom.

This man had connections with the white slave traders—if those engaged in this business are entitled to the dignity of this title—and he had a remarkable knowledge, and as I early suspected, a financial interest in some of the night-haunts of the old city.

Even here, this remarkable dual personality was amazingly demonstrated, for on the one hand he could and would encompass the ruin of a girl, and

on the other pander to the most depraved tastes of the sex.

It was noteworthy also that except for taking some financial gain in assisting in the procuring of a girl—and here there was a lucrative trade to be done among the rich Turks of the interior—he would have nothing to do with those night haunts where men could derive their pleasures. In fact, the mere proximity of such places was sufficient to engender in him one of his most aggravating and surly moods.

No, having devoted so many years to a study of feminine psychology in the mass, he took a quixotic delight in furthering woman's lowest promptings; and there was only one rule—the woman had to be rich.

Our eunuch, notwithstanding his age, and the fact that as far as I could determine he was a man entirely without family connections, was still avaricious, and he accumulated money for money's sake. Money had been his one consolation through the years, and its attainment had now become a fetish.

It was in the twisted brain of this bloated old man that there had been conceived the Order of the Black-Rimmed Monocle. I give it that title, for his agents—and they were faultlessly dressed men of the world—sport black-rimmed eye-glasses. While I was in Constantinople I met three of them. He may, or may not, have employed more.

To the initiated, these rings of black-rimmed glass had a vital and special significance. They were emblems of a cult, and they were worn absolutely and entirely for the edification of rich women.

CHAPTER V

BEHIND THE VEIL OF OLD ISTANBUL

THOROUGHLY to understand the implications of the Order of the Black-Rimmed Monocle one has to be armed with the knowledge that there are eunuchs, and eunuchs.

Actually, this is a condition which was much commented upon by the Ancients, and oblique references to it are to be found both in the Bible, and other religious literature.

It does not necessarily follow, however, that there is any widespread knowledge of the subject. Indeed, my own observations have indicated that there is an abysmal ignorance. Quite apart from the fact that it is something which is not ordinarily discussed, there is a marked paucity of literature dealing with this matter, and that which obtains is outside the reach of even the technical reader. In addition, the opportunities which occur to derive first-hand information on a matter such as this are so rare, and so unique, that I think that that which I am able to relate is probably unexampled in contemporary writings.

In dealing with something more than a little erotic, I will do my utmost to utilise plain, matter-of-fact phraseology in the hope that I will not offend. I will not endeavour to adorn practices which have been vili-

fied down the ages, and I only speak of them because I believe that unless one is aware of the existence of strange cults one's education is woefully incomplete.

The cult of castration was condemned by Mahomed, the Prophet, yet by one of the world's ironies, it remained for Turkey, the spiritual home of the Caliph, to be the principal Eastern nation to countenance and even further the practice.

When I said that there are eunuchs, and eunuchs, I did not mean to infer that these were men like our old informant. No. For him, and others like him, life was just a physical blank with a brain rendered riotous by thoughts highly erotic and a maddening urge to achieve the unattainable. The only allure he could have for the opposite sex lay, in his youth at least, and before his condition rendered him bloated and wrinkled, in his curiously soft voice, the smooth and soft texture of his skin, the complete absence of hair upon his chin or his body, and upon traits curiously feminine.

But there were (and are) other eunuchs with a condition not so desperate, and whose bodies had been maltreated to effect a definite purpose.

Our old man had lost his all. In the various countries of the East there are those who have been variously treated. Particularly are there those upon whom the "half-operation" only was performed. A man in this condition remains a man with all man's attributes. His voice is not affected, he does not lose his hair; he retains all his powers, and he is only minus the means of conveying his pleasure to others. Such men obtain relief to their feelings by diverse means into

which it is not necessary to enter. There are many such men in Eastern lands, and they have submitted themselves to the knife usually for purely religious reasons. Believing that they could the better devote their thoughts to Heaven if they were deprived of the relaxations of the married state, they invoke the aid of the surgeon. In a sense, one can understand this. It is a matter to which many references have been made through the ages, and with that one can leave it.

But there remains a third and different form of castration, and one which has been commercialised. It is this which I have in mind when telling of the Order of the Black-Rimmed Monocle.

Eunuchs coming into this category have undergone a very painful initiation. In some cases they had submitted themselves to "half-operations." Others had achieved the same end much in the same manner as an entire is rendered a gelding. In any event, any of these means to a wealthy end must be exquisitely agonising, for none of these men will submit to anaesthetics.

These latter are the men with an appeal for some women, and considering the character of their initiation, and the relatively brief periods of their "working" life, the enormous fees which they command do not appear to be in any way excessive.

Not for one moment do I suggest that ethically these men are entitled to any recompense for the state to which they had voluntarily condemned themselves. If they received their true deserts they would be cast into prison, and not allowed their freedom until a period of some years, at least, had passed. This would put them

beyond the power of commercialising their bodies, and the perverted instincts of some women, and they would have committed themselves to physical degradation to no good financial purpose.

When I suggested that the fees which they receive do not appear excessive, I merely meant to suggest that in the mind of the normal man any sum, no matter how large and attractive, should be insufficient to induce him to prostitute himself to the plane of the eunuch.

Our old man took an almost insane delight in obtaining recruits for his "harem," as he maliciously termed it. He appeared to derive some immense inner satisfaction in overcoming the scruples of the apprehensive, and in submerging the thoughts of the relatively decent in an exotic welter of desire cum gain.

He never rushed his men, and once he had selected a likely male "specimen," he was content to play with him for months as a cat does with a mouse. The more formidable the victim's revulsion, the more intense the pleasure this revolting creature derived in overcoming obstacles.

Yet, to be singled out by this bloated negro was to come under the power of his hypnotic eye. It meant, in the end, a visit to the back premises of a Turkish apothecary, known to intimates as the "Knacker's Yard."

The consummation of the old man's pleasure was when he visited the premises of this accommodating apothecary, and gloated over his man while he was in the throes of becoming one of the twilight cult. The Khan found considerable satisfaction in accompanying

him. Though I had more than one invitation I resolutely refused to witness what was nothing less than an abortion.

I was frequently present, however, when the old man was presenting his case to a likely eunuch, and I must admit that the arguments he advanced were worthy of a much better cause.

Because of the nature of the "work" performed, and the peculiar character of the operation, it followed that there must be a more or less continual sequence of recruits to take the place of those who had finally become entirely impotent. Thus it was that with the passage of time the old eunuch had his arguments well marshalled. To listen to him one would almost become convinced that he was conferring a great favour by suggesting that a man should deprive himself of his normal functions.

Invariably did this old rascal select men of outstanding physique. The reason for this became obvious to me later. He demanded broad shoulders, a good torso, and a sound heart action. He cared little or nothing for brains. All that he desired was a male animal.

Consequently it was that his methods of approach were peculiar. Perhaps one of these prospective victims had more than an ordinarily developed religious turn of mind. His final declaration to him, after other scruples had been worn down, was that Man was originally born in the likeness of God, but had become defiled. Before Eve tempted Adam, he would say, the Garden had been sexless, and both male and female lacked generative organs. Then it was that Eve plucked of the forbidden fruit, and humans were

required everlastingly to bear the signs of Man's perfidy.

He argued that if a man should truly seek his God he should humiliate himself, and assume Man's original form. The peculiar operation which he offered to the selected he described as the Gate to Asceticism. The state which he enjoined he painted as a period of initiation to the final attainment of impotency and the last righteous ceremonial—the wielding of the knife.

I will not attempt here to reproduce the flowery hyperbole with which he embellished this monstrous thesis; sufficient is it to state that our eunuch actually persuaded men to undergo this defilement, and to enter upon the life which he had planned for them, entirely without desire of gain, and with enthusiasm and fire akin to fanaticism. They honestly believed that they were in a middle world betwixt the lustful desires of Man, and the attainment of the Infinite.

There were others who were won over entirely by the argument of gain. They were told that here there was a means to considerable wealth, and the wherewithal with which to pass a pleasant life when they became "tired" of the life to which they were invited.

And, it must not be assumed that this curious trade was entirely confined to men of our eunuch's race. That was far from being the case, for there were several men from Georgian Russia and from Circassia who had voluntarily entered the twilight state. They were there entirely for gain, and, of course, they were men whose ancestry was purely white.

Now what manner of women availed themselves of

the invitations so deftly and subtly proffered by the agents in the black-rimmed monocles?

Not merely Turkish women alone, I assure you. There were many women from farther West, and not a few Americans who, in the positive knowledge that no ill consequences could result, spent many an afternoon so-called sightseeing in our eunuch's establishment while elderly husbands, bored with the continuous round with guide book in hand, took a much-wanted siesta upon an hotel verandah.

Among the richer Turkish women there were regular clients. In their case their inclinations could be the better understood. I think it is symbolic of the East that sex should play a greater part in the lives of ordinary people than it does in the West. For one thing it is referred to much more openly, and there is little that is covert. A girl knows the functions for which she has been born long before her Western prototype has discarded her dolls and her belief that she came under the parental roof via the black bag carried by the doctor. A lad, more often than not, is openly encouraged to have intercourse at an early age, in the belief that his powers will thereby be increased, and liable to fade if he neglects what is deemed an essential exercise.

Consequently, there is born in both sexes a desire for procreation. This desire is freely and frankly admitted, and it is fanned in a variety of ways. But it so often happens, especially in those circles where there is money, that an old man marries a young bride. The time comes when the man can no longer satisfy the demands of a healthy wife. They may be at their full

flood, and our eunuch, wise in the way of woman, commercialised a means which would bring contentment to the wife, and blind satisfaction to a *passé* husband.

In respect to the old eunuch's slave-trading organisation—to give it its horrific title—really very little need be said about it. I discovered very little in it which even to a slight degree corresponded with the fantastic tales which adorn this trade. I was the old man's intimate, and I had every opportunity of seeing this phase of life for myself, and I have honestly to confess that never once did I come across the cruelly-abducted virgin of fiction.

I must emphasise that I am not endeavouring to condone this traffic. It has many ugly sides and many unpleasant features, but there is little actual abduction in it, principally because abduction is so dangerous, and from the point of view of the procurer, so infernally expensive.

The demand in Near Eastern and Eastern countries for white women as prostitutes and as professional entertainers is high, and especially in such countries as Russia, where the standard of living is admittedly lamentable, and in Germany where anyone suspected of possessing non-Aryan blood is automatically an outcast, it is not difficult to fire the imagination of susceptible girls. Admittedly, the procurers use over-persuasion akin to actual deceit; they offer to their intended recruits travel facilities which are little more than a trap to land the girls at their destination heavily in debt; but they do not abduct and kidnap.

That kind of thing may have happened in the past.

Quite frankly, according to my observations, it is not even necessary to-day.

There is, of course, still a very real need for those protective organisations which are so admirably run in some countries, and particularly in England, but their function is not to secure the freedom of some unfortunate, bedrugged innocent, as much as to dissuade a girl from embarking upon a life to which she was probably more than half committed before ever she came in contact with the agent who so kindly offers to assume the role of a fairy Thomas Cook.

The chief attraction held out to these recruits is that they will be removed from a sphere where their value upon the labour market is negligible to one where their colour alone will spell for them the good things of this life. It is emphasised—and this is literally true—that they will only come into contact with the well-to-do, and that many opportunities will occur for settling down as mistresses of wealthy men.

The tragedies occur when the bloom of youth has departed. Women of this class are seldom of a saving disposition, and there is nothing so disturbing to the social fabric as the sight of an unwanted prostitute, desolate, destitute, and homeless.

In all ways the trade in women is despicable, yet I could understand the eunuch when he said that if he failed to provide the opportunities for women with certain inclinations, others would speedily be there to do so.

Lest I should scoff he produced a large bundle of letters, and he asked me to select one at random.

I did so, and to the best of my memory, it was written somewhat in this form:

It was written from Paris, and it was addressed to Mademoiselle Plon, the eunuch's outrageous *nom de plume* for these purposes.

"I learn that you have vacancies in your establishments in Istanbul, and I am writing to you on behalf of a friend who would join you were the terms sufficiently attractive.

"She is, of course, a French girl. She is nineteen years of age—not yet twenty—and she is a very pretty blonde with the requisite black eyes.

"She wishes to know your terms, and the net profit which she might be expected to make *daily*. She desires to know also all other particulars, and more especially of the class of men who visit your establishments, the price they normally pay, the percentage which has to be paid to the house, and an outside estimate of monthly personal expenses.

"On her behalf I am to say that if she can make four hundred francs a day she will be obliged if you will cable; otherwise she will make other arrangements."

The eunuch chuckled as I read the letter out loud.

"They are all the same," he remarked in his disturbing falsetto. "Always do they write on behalf of a 'friend,' and—these French girls! They are as hard as nails beneath their finery. With them it is francs—francs—francs, and yet more francs."

He should have known. So many had passed through his hands.

Actually, and this will give great satisfaction to the majority of the readers of this book, the demand for such women from Occidental countries is now decreasing at a noticeable rate. When Turkey was part of the Ottoman Empire instead of the Turkish Republic, conditions were very much less suitable for family life than they are now, and the percentage of unmarried males in the chief centres was astonishingly high. Then, the only outlet for many men was provided by the prostitute. Now, family life has largely filled this need.

Here, and before closing this chapter, I would add a word of warning to professional entertainers who are often offered large sums to ply their art in Istanbul and other large cities approximating to the Near East.

There is a certain allure about these cities which the newcomer finds difficult to resist, and in most of them it is usual for the entertainer to be free to mingle with the audience during performances at cafés, and similar places of entertainment, and accept invitations to dance with them. It naturally follows that the majority of female artists who visit such places are in themselves dancers, for the language difficulty renders any other form of art difficult of presentation.

There is in Oriental countries a disposition born of centuries of custom to regard the dancer as something which in most Occidental cases she is not, and though this assumption may be veiled by a perfect courtesy, and an unimpeachable deportment, it is nevertheless there, and where there is any weakness of the flesh, is liable to lead to trouble.

For the authorities in many of these cities there is much to be said, although their regulations respecting the sex urge would horrify London.

The existance of prostitution is frankly admitted, and in none of these cities, therefore, is one confronted with the spectacle nightly to be seen in Piccadilly and its environs.

In many respects I consider the laws to be in advance of what obtain in England.

It is expressly laid down, for instance, that if rape has been committed on the person of an unmarried girl, the offender shall, in addition to receiving an award of hard labour, be sentenced to pay compensation to the victim.

In other respects also, the sex laws are eminently sensible. It is laid down that any person who, having by promise of marriage, seduced a girl who has reached the age of puberty, refuses to marry her, shall be sentenced to pay compensation to the victim, and to a term of not less than one week's imprisonment, and not more than six months.

This only operates when the man is able to *prove* that there was an offer of marriage. If he fails, then he is indicted on the much more serious charge of rape.

Clandestine prostitution is expressly forbidden, though of course, it flourishes, but any women discovered to be engaged in prostitution is automatically included in the list of official prostitutes. And all women engaging in this oldest of old professions must submit themselves to bi-weekly physical inspections.

Emerging from these regulations—and there are

many more—is the possibility—I do not say probability—of a girl found in compromising circumstances being automatically branded as a prostitute.

Visiting artists cannot know this regulation too well, even though the authorities do their utmost to safeguard their interests in other ways. The authority for entry is generally only accorded on the basis of a definite contract of employment, and this is always for one month, renewable on good behaviour. As a further assurance, and in order to ensure that artists shall be permitted to return to their own countries when their contracts have expired, employers must retain from salaries a sum usually assessed at six hundred francs. This is deemed sufficient, in ordinary circumstances, to see a girl safely back to the capital city of her homeland.

CHAPTER VI

A NEAR EASTERN PANORAMA

OUR eunuch once derived a very considerable income from providing European dancing girls for the less reputable cafés of Baghdad, Beirut, Damascus, and elsewhere. He conducted an agency for this purpose at Istanbul, but officialdom had frowned upon such institutions, and he had been almost the first to close down.

When in Baghdad later, I found that eight dancing establishments of the character I have in mind were allowed by the police. Four were for native dancers, and four for foreign, and each establishment was allowed a maximum complement of four dancers. That is, in the whole of Baghdad, the regulations allowed sixteen native dancers, and sixteen foreign. I discovered that while the native establishments were up to full strength, those with European personnel were considerably under, and the type in the European café was the reverse of appealing.

In all these dancing cafés girls are expected freely to mix with the habitués, and indeed, to obtain the major part of their emoluments in this manner.

From my own observations in Baghdad, Damascus, Teheran, Beirut, and elsewhere, I can quite definitely state that what little allure this life might have held out for European women has been largely dissipated.

I found the establishments sordid, entirely without glamour, tawdry in their appointments, and with little that would appeal to a European woman of even the lowest tastes.

In not one of these many establishments did I find a single British girl. There were Persians, Syrians, and Russians, and not a few who claimed to be French but who, I shrewdly suspect, were Greek, and who had acquired a French technique.

As our old man of Istanbul had been at considerable pains to point out, the Frenchwoman is essentially mercenary. Her thoughts are centred upon the accumulation of francs, and though these establishments provide an attractive income for women from countries where the standard of living is low, there is little there to fire the acquisitive instincts of the average Frenchwoman.

As for the British woman, I have found that even when she has been addicted to prostitution for years, she still retains an inherent sense of decency which is sufficient to keep her away from the places to which I refer. In the few cases which I have observed, where British women of this profession have degraded themselves by excessive drinking, they have retained what I term their "decent" faculties until long past that time when the ravages of drink have made them abhorrent to men.

This old man did not bemoan the passing of this traffic. He had devoted himself to other avenues of "trade," and, as I have indicated, had found them exceedingly profitable.

Before the Khan and I left Istanbul he gave us a

letter of introduction to a Turkish notable who, he informed us, had actually married one of the British girls who had passed through his hands some years before. He assured us that this person, who lived on the outskirts of Ankara, would be pleased to see us, and that though a man of the old Turkey he was sufficiently broadminded, and sufficiently generous in outlook, not to regard his household as something for his own eyes, and his eyes alone. In other words, the eunuch indicated that in all probability we would be provided with an opportunity to meet this woman socially.

I am afraid that our manner of leaving Istanbul was again typical of the Khan.

His French was terrible, and my pronunciation of some words was not what it should be, because although I have more than a smattering of tongues it perhaps necessarily follows that my native tongue comes first, English a good second, and because of my native lingo, Persian and Arabic an equal third.

That night there had been something of a carousal, and the Khan was in the merriest of moods. We had been round and about in old Istanbul, and we had become lost.

We had wandered aimlessly about for a considerable time when the Khan, in his roisterous manner, suggested that it would be better if we enquired our way.

It chanced that ahead of us, and coming in our direction, was a portly officer of gendarmerie.

With heavy, yet unassailable courtesy, the Khan stopped this officer, and gently enquired whether he

spoke English. The man looked puzzled, so I stepped quickly into the breach, and addressed him in French.

With the ceremonious detachment of the Turkish men of his class, he coldly directed us on our way. We had to proceed straight on, then take the third turning to the left. The officer naturally used the word "gauche." He too had been roistering, and his accents were guttural.

The Khan, who had been listening avidly, and with the exaggerated earnestness of one who had taken liquor, perked up his ears when he heard this, and blandly enquired of me:

"What has he got under his crutch?"

There was a moment's awful silence before the officer replied in perfect English, and in a tone which would have deterred even the most aggressive:

"Sir, I have nothing under my crutch!"

The atmosphere was definitely one of strain, but the Khan was by no means perturbed. He gave a silly alcoholic giggle, and poked the officer where he wore his medals.

"You old rascal," he said, whimsically, "and you said you didn't know English!"

Unfortunately the officer was standing on the so-called kerb, and when he saw that accusing finger coming to contaminate his person, he involuntarily stepped backwards. In so doing, he tripped over his loosely hanging sword, and precipitated his rather gorgeous person into the not too savoury gutter.

The Khan was the first to grasp the potentialities of the situation.

"Quick," he gasped, "we'll get hard-labour for this!" And we ran.

We raced round corners, and completely lost ourselves again. When we eventually once more enquired our direction it was done with more circumspection.

We left immediately for Anatolia, and we arrived at Eski-Shehr—a dusty, poverty-stricken village, yet with an historic name, nevertheless.

The Greeks never mention it without spitting. The Turk intones it with something akin to reverence.

The Greeks, when they occupied Asia Minor after the Great War advanced to a point beyond Eski-Shehr. In their final retreat before Mustapha Kemal, they demolished half the town, and set fire to the rest.

It was at this spot that Mustapha Kemal achieved his greatest victory, and set the seal upon the ascendancy which was to spell the banishment of the Caliphs.

Here one can still recapture the spirit of that extraordinary war in respect to which the Western nations shut a dignified eye. There are roofless and shapeless structures still begrimed with smoke. Reconstruction is slowly going on.

In Eski-Shehr they still regard the stranger with some suspicion. One has to carry one's passport everywhere, and even then one is liable to be hauled off, with the greatest politeness it is true, to the local police station for interrogation.

When first we were interrogated the Khan had visions of that last night in Istanbul.

"I knew that officer would report the matter!" He groaned in apprehension.

Yet, on the route to the police station the way led by a café. The policeman suggested coffee, and, naturally, we insisted upon paying.

At the police station, after a nervous official had asked us our business and had fingered our passports—he was obviously incapable of reading what was written upon them—we were invited to a room at the rear of the station. Here we were regaled with coffee, melon, more coffee, and with meat and Oriental sweets.

And the policeman who had apprehended us acted as waiter!

So much for the Khan's fears.

In the hills beyond Eski-Shehr is Ankara—the home of the new Turkey. On the crown of one hill is the old city built by Timur the Lame. On the second rocky eminence is the Yanishahr, or new city. Here is the meeting place of the Turkish Grand National Assembly, the Government buildings, the imposing residences of the Ambassadors, and the home of Mustapha Kemal, the Ghazi, now known to the world as Atatürk.

Kemal, the modern Napoleon, is frequently to be seen upon the streets, and always in an open motor car. There is little of the traditional Turk about him outwardly. He might have stepped from Savile Row; and there is little that is striking about him, physically. He has not the dominance of Mussolini, yet he possesses steel-grey eyes which gaze at one unblinkingly. When one addresses him those eyes remain steadfast and unwavering. It is a disconcerting attribute.

This is the man who defied the might of the Allies,

played rings round Mr. Lloyd George, collected forces from within a disarmed Turkey, defeated and routed the Greeks, brought down a monarchy, disposed of the Caliphs, hanged those who stood in the way of self-expression, proclaimed a Republic, and assumed the rôle of leadership.

This is the modern Turkey.

Beyond, and away in the province of Konia, the true Osmani Islam still survives. Konia is a land of cornfields and pastures. Here dwell the real Cilician Turks who helped the Sultans to make the area the centre of Islamic culture for five hundred years.

In the centre of the town of Konia there is a statue of Kemal, with hand outstretched. Perhaps this is symbolical.

At the moment the hand of the reformer is still, and Konia is almost as it was centuries ago.

The winding lanes of the town are wide and clean. Every house is surrounded by walls of clay, and all are high. There are but few women in evidence upon the streets, and the fez is still worn. In the streets and lanes of Konia, Western clothes would create a riot.

The centre of the town is the caravanserai where caravans assemble from all parts of the East. Here traders unload their merchandise, and chant their prayers of thankfulness for a safe journey. The men spread their bedding in close proximity to their camels. They squat and inhale of their hookahs. One hears the dialect of Samarkhand, of Syria, of Kurdish Iraq, and of far off Afghanistan.

It was here, in the evening that a messenger came to us. The evening shades were creeping over the

minarets, and the domes of the mosques were beginning to emerge more clearly from the haze which had shrouded them during the day. The camels, with shuddering regurgitations, expelled the slimy waters from their inner recesses. The Imams were intoning their prayers.

It was a scene which all Eastern travellers know, and there was only one incongruous note. From somewhere the Khan had conjured a new and fearful toy. It was a wheezy, portable gramophone. The strains of a plaintive Scottish dirge came pulsatingly from a cracked record, and they appeared to give the Khan infinite pleasure.

I was glad to greet the messenger. Our Eunuch of Istanbul had been better than his word. Not only had he provided us with a letter of introduction, but he had written ahead to this Turkish notable, and had apprised him of our coming.

The messenger took us to an estate about twelve miles from Konia, and to one of the most remarkable menages I have ever seen. Our host was a Turk of the old school, but as the eunuch had suggested, he was a man of ripe wit, and with ideas respecting his women-folk which were at once redolent of the Sultanic Turkey, and the new regime signified by the outstretched hand of Kemal.

He had no seraglio, but he had availed himself fully of the Law which allows a man four wives, and in order that he might live in peace with his entourage, he had completely remodelled his stately home.

There was a main, central block, and at each corner a tower-like edifice. There were four of these, and he

assured us with a smile that they were alike in every particular. The rooms were the same, the furnishings were the same, and in each, an entity unto herself, was a wife. None could quarrel with the others because of any sense of preferment.

He told us quite frankly that his English wife had once been his mistress. He had found her sturdy common sense and her other British characteristics so stimulating that he had at length decided to marry her.

And this woman, born of a nation which expects its women to fly to the divorce court should the husband so much as look at another female, had settled comfortably down to the thought of there being three other wives who shared her husband's bed on occasion, and withal appeared content and happy.

We did not really expect to see her, but we did, and on the very first evening.

She was then, I should judge by her husband's conversation, a woman of about forty, yet because of her life as a Turkish wife of the old school, she looked no more than thirty. Turkish women of her age would have appeared at least sixty in comparison, and it was easy to see why she retained the old notable's regard.

She was dressed in the Turkish raiment of the old style—that is long silken trousers reaching to the ankles, fully fashioned, a curious garment called a *yelek* which begins as a closely fitting waistcoat, richly made and embroidered, and an *etari*, or gown, perhaps the most important garment of the old Turkish indoor costume. This garment has sleeves tight to the elbow which then billow out. Like the *yelek*, it is tight to the body, but

it opens at the front to expose the bosom to a rather alarming extent.

This Englishwoman, however, carried off both her attire and the conversation with entire aplomb. I had expected to see a woman of the lower class. I found, to my surprise, that she was well educated, and fully at home in her surroundings. Obviously also, she had great influence over our host. She seemed happy and contented, and when she took her leave, she did so with grace, and a quiet, homely smile as one would normally expect from the hostess in some large house in her native England.

With the Oriental courtesy which the occasion warranted the Khan and I thanked our host for so graciously allowing his wife so charmingly to entertain us with her converse.

He smiled at the compliment, and observed that he was not like some of his countrymen of the old school. He had no real objection, he added, to his sensible English wife meeting visitors when in his presence. There was, and could be no real harm in that, and it kept women contented. But . . .

His principal objection, it seemed, was not against men, but against other women. As he pointed out, when his women folk went out they wore the old-fashioned and voluminous veil, and in that garb they were sacrosanct. No male would so much as dare to molest them, or touch them.

He proceeded further to explain his views on this subject, and said that one of the first things he did when he inherited his property was to have proper Turkish baths installed for his women. In no circum-

stances, he declared, would he allow any woman of his to attend the public baths in Ankara where it was normal for the majority of women to congregate, even those of well-to-do families.

He maintained that the intimate details of the Turkish woman's toilet frequently led to undue familiarities and to the pitfalls of Lesbianism, and he maintained, once a woman had fallen into that bottomless pit she looked with scorn upon her husband, and all men.

He explained that women attended these public baths and despite the injunction to the contrary, took the vapours and the waters in a complete state of nakedness. They assisted one another in their ablutions, and in the frequent massaging.

He assured us with much gravity that Lesbianism was rife in such places, and that it produced very considerable unhappiness.

Our host was sufficiently an old Turk to provide us with an old-time entertainment.

From somewhere he spirited together a collection of girls who came and danced for our pleasure. Some of these creatures were bewitching, and they employed some of the cleverest coquetry I have ever seen.

Even the Khan was startled, and he gave himself up to the voluptuousness of the entertainment.

All the girls had melodious voices, several of them could play on a variety of stringed instruments, and all of them could dance.

Our host watched through lazy, amused eyes, and when he thought we had had enough of this public entertainment he clapped his hands.

Sombrely, and with a majesty which a Mayfair butler might have envied, a servant entered with a heavily worked brass salver.

On it were two small silk handkerchiefs.

To the Khan and myself he came, and gravely, we each took one.

The servant's entry was the signal for much laughter and excited chatter among the girls, but at a chiding word from our host they desisted, and began a dance even more voluptuous than any that had gone before.

Slowly they danced, circling before the Khan and myself.

I saw the Khan, his eyes alight, drop his handkerchief before a tiny pair of twinkling feet.

I saw the feet stop in their intricate patterning, and trip alongside those of the striding Khan. The girl he had chosen wore a pleasant smile.

Still the instrumentalists played, and still the girls danced.

I realised that they were circling exclusively now for me.

I felt somewhat embarrassed, for I was confronted with a considerable bevy of feminine beauty.

I looked at my handkerchief, and saw that I had rolled it into a ball in my agitation. It remained so—a talisman never to be used.

CHAPTER VII

ADVENTURE WITH THE ASSASSINS

IN what is now French Syria there is a tiny remnant of a queer race—those who once followed so blindly and enthusiastically the most outrageously conceived designs of that monstrous figure of the Middle Ages, the Sheikh al-Jebal, or as he was known to the Crusaders, “The Old Man of the Mountains.”

Everything that was sinister was associated with this name, but as it merely denoted the Grand Master of that mysterious cult known as the Assassins, it followed that there was more than one bearer of the title.

The remnant of which I speak is to be found in Masyad, a place of ruin and desolation tucked away in hills which dominate a vast countryside.

When the Khan and I left Ankara, we continued our journey through Turkey, and after diverse experiences found ourselves in Syria. With the means at his disposal, the Khan could afford to ignore the beaten track, and thus it was that one day we came to Masyad, an ancient stronghold with the most corrupt associations, still entirely enclosed with walls, and surmounted by a castle which once breathed defiance to the Crusaders.

Here, still living in the innermost recesses of this ancient pile we found a number of families whose forbears had lived there since the days of the Sheikh al-

Jebal. All without exception were extremely poor, as were the scattered families of other Assassins who lived in the vicinity.

In these days, of course, the Assassins do not acknowledge this name of ill-omen. They regard themselves as Ismailians, an off-shoot of the Shiah sect of Muslims.

It was obvious to us that these people lived on indifferent terms with their neighbours. They had an affrighted and apprehensive air, and quite patently had no desire to penetrate beyond their mountains. Because of their inaccessibility, and because of their extreme poverty, they remained comparatively safe as long as they centred their activities upon Masyad.

They clearly regarded us with suspicion when we came among them, but that which the Khan could offer them speedily won their hearts. Hashish he had in quantity, and hashish he was prepared to dispense, and for hashish these miserable descendants of a once virile race were willing to sell their souls.

A number of books have been written about the Assassins, but I am going to assume that the majority who read this are not closely acquainted with the writings of Marco Polo or with those of the Persian geographer, Mustawfi. I confess that I have read neither, and that any knowledge which I might have of these queer people comes of their association with the present-day Shiahs. Nevertheless, perhaps I may be permitted a short digression, for unless there is some background, the real significance of special rites which the Khan and I were allowed to witness cannot be adequately gauged.

The Syrian Assassins were not the originators of a cult which has given an ugly word to the world. They came from Persia where for long after the Muhamedan conquest the people, realising that physical force was useless against the Arab invaders, sought with the subtlety of their race to find some other means to retain their national consciousness.

The Muslim world had already split into two segments—the Sunni and the Shiah, and the most unorthodox of the latter were the Ismailians. Those who sought to fight the Arabs seized upon the Shiah philosophy as a basis for their activities. They produced a leader, for whom they claimed direct descent from the Prophet, who completely won the confidence of the unsuspecting Ismailians and gradually inculcated into their philosophy matters which were far divorced from the original concept of the Muslim Faith.

Curiosity was sufficient to bring many Ismailians into the fold which was first defined by seven steps, and later, nine.

In the first degree the initiate was taught implicit obedience, and those who qualified in this were led to that stage where they were prepared to take an oath of secrecy. The taking of this oath automatically led to the second degree which inculcated belief in the divinely appointed Imams, or direct descendants of the Prophet. In the third degree the initiates were taught that as there were seven seas and seven earths, there were seven Imams, of whom Ismail was the seventh and last. In the fourth the disciple was told that since the inception of the world there had been seven Prophets, each one of whom had altered the doctrines

of his predecessors. Thus, four separate stages had to be traversed before the initiate even suspected that he was to learn that Islam, as preached by the fiery Arabs, was not necessarily final.

In the next and fifth degree what was previously an innuendo became more explicit, and emphasis was laid upon the uselessness of tradition. In the sixth, those who had graduated, were absolved from many Islamic practices, such as fasting and prayer, and in the next they were quite definitely passed from the Islamic fold to a world where mysticism became all or nothing.

Later, the eighth and ninth degrees were elaborated, the subordination of tradition was carried even a stage further, and disciples were encouraged to believe absolutely nothing, and to dare all.

This was the philosophy evolved under the cloak of Islam to produce an inner force which could fight the material hold of the Arabs upon Iran, but it was some centuries before the Assassins were actually born.

Then there arrived Hasan, who in these days would have been termed a Nihilist. He had fallen foul of the Turks and Cairenes, and he bore for them a great hatred. By race Persian, and therefore if a professed Sunni, a Shiah at heart, he wandered throughout the Near East, and finally returned to Persia. There he gave expression to his hatred of Arab supremacy, and found to his delight, after he had been duly initiated, that there were many others who shared his views, and who had a machinery behind them which had been elaborated at least over a period of two centuries.

Enthusiastically he adopted this secret Iranian doctrine, and he became a preacher. Suddenly, and

by a strategem, he was enabled to secure possession of the stronghold of Alamut, in the Persian province of Gilan.

Here, not far from the shores of the Caspian, he consolidated his position, and turned the castle into what the world eventually came to know as "The Vulture's Nest."

By degrees other castles, and more lands, came under his sway, and he defied the Shahs and their Viziers, not with armies, but with the forces of a cult which he had found ready to his hand—and forces which he turned into outrageously criminal channels.

Having no armies, he pounced upon the first precept of this secret Iranian philosophy, viz., absolute and implicit obedience, and he moulded it in fantastic ways, and—principally with the assistance of hashish.

Mysticism and hashish were his means to power, and the assassin's knife was his weapon.

All who attempted to curb his pretensions or were suspected of intrigue died quickly, and invariably with a dagger in their body. It did not matter that swift and terrible retribution fell upon the Assassin. This, in fact, was courted, and there were hundreds of volunteers always ready to carry out the orders of the Old Man of the Mountains, and thus to seek death and Paradise.

How did the Sheikh achieve such ascendancy?

Really, it was delightfully simple.

All he had to do was to blend the Iranian's fatalism with religious exaltation, and he had hundreds of ready instruments to his hand.

Near his Vulture's Nest, he prepared a secret garden.

There was only one method of approach, and that was by means of a cunningly hidden tunnel.

In the garden grew the most delicious fruits, and every fragrant shrub that could be induced to grow shed its aromatic delights upon all who entered. There were kiosks and palaces in the garden. Golden ornamentation was the principal *motif* of the architecture, and within were the most sumptuous divans covered with the richest silks. Around these ornate buildings were conduits, and on requisite occasions, manifold streams bearing wine, honey, crystal clear water, and milk would flow in all directions to bewilder the eye and excite the palate.

In every kiosk and in every palace were beautiful damsels. Not only could they sing, but they could dance with divine perfection; the playing of no musical instrument came amiss, but especially were they expert in dalliance and amorous allure.

The visitor to this secret garden saw them attired in the richest of dresses, amusing themselves among the kiosks and palaces. To add piquancy to the occasion, there were chaperons, but these female dragons were confined to the deepest recesses of the palaces and were never allowed to appear in public.

Consequently, so relatively few were the visits of man, that the maidens exerted their utmost efforts to secure his favour, and this in the mind of those who visited it was Paradise.

It was this Hasan who promised to those who should obey his will that the full enjoyments of Paradise should ensue; and this was a Paradise where every form of sensual enjoyment should attend the Faithful, and

where there should be an unlimited abundance of beautiful Nymphs.

Hasan, for his own purposes, reproduced this Paradise upon earth, and those young men he selected as his instruments were conveyed thither, via the secret tunnel, and under the influence of hashish.

Prior to their entry to the garden, he would discourse at length upon the delights of the Paradise, and his own ability to grant admission. Then, thoroughly bemused with hashish, which in itself added enchantment to the garden scene, the initiates were conveyed to the Nymph-ridden Heaven, and there regaled with the most voluptuous caresses, the most heady of wines, an excess of all enjoyments, and with the inevitable conclusion that Hasan had kept his word and had projected them into Paradise.

Four or five days of the delights of the garden would suffice to force home this conclusion, then the initiate, still under the influence of hashish, would be withdrawn through the secret tunnel. An interval for recuperation would ensue, and the young man would find himself in the presence of Hasan.

Sternly, Hasan would ask them where they had been.

"In Paradise," they would reply, and invariably these confessions were made before the fully assembled court. Positively, there was no deception.

Thereafter, convinced that Hasan could open the gates of Paradise for them at will, these young men were prepared to enter into any danger, and to carry out any order which their leader might give them.

An indication of the implicit obedience which was accorded the successive Old Men of the Mountains is

given in the account of what occurred when the Sultan Seljuq sent an envoy to Hasan demanding his submission.

Hasan, confronted by the envoy, merely summoned one of his men to him, and said: "Kill thyself," and immediately the man plunged a dagger into his heart.

To another, he said: "Throw thyself from the rampart," and the next moment the man was a mutilated corpse upon the rocks far below.

The envoy, terror-stricken by what he had seen, turned helplessly to Hasan, who smiled, and drily observed:

"In this way I am served by seventy thousand faithful followers! . . . That is my answer to the Sultan."

A little more than a century later, the Count of Champagne was in the neighbourhood of the Syrian stronghold of Masyad, and the Prior there sent him an invitation. The Count accepted, and he records that when he neared the castle he saw two look-out men stationed upon a lofty turret.

The Prior observed that his men obeyed him better than did the Christians their Princes, and the Count expressed dubious astonishment. Immediately the Prior gave a signal, and in response both look-out men hurled themselves to the battlements below.

"If you desire it," said the Prior to the astonished Count, all my men shall throw themselves from the turrets in the same way."

The Count of Champagne declined, and was forced to confess that he could not count upon such obedience from his own servants.

This particular Syrian Prior was Rashid, who left Persia to build up the cult of the Assassins at Masyad. He proved himself a real Old Man of the Mountains, and he fully maintained the awe-inspiring traditions of the redoubtable Hasan, for he carried the dagger of the Assassin into the camps of Christian and Saracen alike. The Syrian Assassins, because their sphere of influence was more Western, became better known to the Christian World than did the original body in Persia.

Since the power of these terrible men was finally broken, the Assassins have degenerated from the mighty, virile race which could defy the might of Continents. Now they are a miserable handful of some few thousands. As I have indicated they are miserably poor, and they are almost indescribably dirty. Their mean hovels are verminous, and they still use the filthy pools which quenched the thirst of those who fought and harried the Crusaders.

The pool outside Masyad opens out to the dimensions of a considerable lake whenever it rains, and it is still supposed to possess supernatural powers.

To the outside world they are now just Muslims with a somewhat detached turn of mind, but within their own circle they are prone to the obscene and the bacchanalian. Their lives are remote, and their ancient fastness is practically unvisited, yet they go to extraordinary lengths to preserve secrecy, and the outside world now knows little or nothing of their orgies.

There is only one key which will unlock the secret, and that is hashish. The ancient rites of the Assassins may have lingered down the centuries until they are

but a shadow of their former selves, but the desire for hashish remains. Not only is it smoked for the pleasure which it provides, but it is held to maintain that connecting link between the present and the mightiness which was once Hasan's and Rashid's.

Being so miserably poor, these unfortunates may but seldom indulge in their favourite vice, but with the advent of the Khan and his plentiful supplies, a marked change came over dispirited Masyad.

The aged and the decrepit possessed themselves of a new fire, and the middle-aged and younger men had a new elasticity to their step, and an air of new-born desire.

These men were insatiable in their demands for hashish, and as the drug cemented its control, this coterie of newly awakened visionaries began to speak mysteriously of their oft-neglected worship and of something which was covertly referred to as the *Rodhah*. This normally means garden, or pleasaunce, and I was mystified, because it was apparent from the wisps of conversation which we overheard that the *Rodhah* was animate. The Khan and I discussed this matter, and could give no satisfactory explanation, and our first attempts to induce these men to talk proved futile.

It was not until the Khan dropped upon the expedient of cutting off his gifts of hashish that these Assassins became more amenable. Then, with the greatest reluctance we were informed that the *Rodhah* was a girl, and that she was so called because the rites in which she was required to play the part of the principal performer harked back to those dark days

of the Middle Ages when there was indeed a local garden, or Paradise where nymphs could be had for the beckoning.

Much ground had to be traversed before the Khan could induce these people to admit us to the forthcoming seance. There were angry murmurs, and even threats, when the subject was first tactfully mooted, but the Khan held the whip hand. Also, it seemed that the requisite atmosphere would prove elusive but for a generous smoking of hashish, and the illusory delights which this drug can summon to the brain, and to tired and exhausted bodies.

As I watched the preliminary drug orgies, and the false sense of exotic excitement which these engendered in this debilitated race, it became obvious even to me that it was not poverty or even environment which had brought these Assassins to their present pass, but the very hashish which had brought them their infamous notoriety in the Middle Ages. Long years of hashish smoking had taken their toll.

I was looking at the remnants of a race of men who had once been all powerful. Now, they were miserably degenerate, and this degeneration could be laid entirely at the door of centuries of unbridled exotic orgies.

Around them were men who had lived a live akin to normality—the Arabs, the men of the Jebel Druse, and even the town-bred Syrian. The environment was the same for all, the climatic conditions were unvarying; on the one hand were fine, upstanding humans; on the other, degenerates who would be useless if known upon the labour market. They neither had the

physical ability to labour ; nor the mental ability of a normal child of ten.

Hashish, and an inheritance of sexual over-indulgence carried without intermission through an incredibly long series of years had produced pitiful caricatures.

Yet, here and there, one came across the exception. One found the body beautiful, and—naturally these were women. These were women who had remained sheltered—women who were perhaps in the direct line of descent from Rashid himself, for Rashid maintained his power by the practice of the severest ascetism. He would plunge others into his Paradise of Delight, and he would command all to smoke of hashish and sample the alcoholic delights of his famous Garden ; yet his own life was noted for its austerity. He neither smoked nor drank ; nor is there any reason to believe that he himself indulged in any of the sexual orgies which he promulgated as part of the Assassin cult.

As the days passed, so did the atmosphere of suppressed excitement well up within this strange community.

Noise within Masyad materially increased.

Masyad, instead of being a stronghold of ghosts, and of memories of a past greatness, pulsed with a synthetic robustness, and one of the outward signs of this new-born virility was Noise.

Noise is relative.

In the city, the terrific din of modern traffic, the shattering fusillade of the pneumatic drills, and the bustle of a million humans, is absorbed into the atmosphere.

Noise, to be appreciated, must have a background of silence.

Nothing, for instance, can produce a greater effect upon the senses than the beating of a tom-tom, perhaps several miles away, provided that all is quiet around one, and the air is clear.

Masyad throbbed to the staccato beating of drums, and it went on for hours and hours upon end. The noise ate into my nerves, for though I have been accustomed to hearing the beat of drums since birth, my ear has been educated.

Then, at last came the night of the ceremonial—the night of sexual rejuvenation, as it was called.

Again there were murmurs against our inclusion, and there were occasions when the situation appeared to be positively dangerous, for the Khan and I were not now dealing with spiritless degenerates, but with men whose brains had been hazed by hashish and who were temporarily uplifted to that degree where they could afford to spit at and be condescending toward outsiders. However, the Khan had his way, as usual, and we were eventually conducted into one of the major vaults of the ruined castle.

There an astonishing sight met our eyes.

The entire male community was gathered, and—we were part and parcel of the strange service of the adoration of the *Rodhah*.

Seated upon a high chair, and attired in a white robe, was a singularly beautiful girl. She was young, and upon her head she wore a chaplet of newly gathered flowers.

Seemingly, the *Rodhah* must be a virgin, and she

remains as the *Rodhah* until she marries which, by the way, she may do quite honorably. When she assumes the married state another *Rodhah* is found. She must be one of the elect, and she must conform to certain standards in respect to the colour of her eyes, and her hair.

When we entered the vault all the men were kneeling, and chanting sacred songs. This singing appeared to proceed interminably, but eventually it worked up to a kind of crescendo to give way to a stark silence.

The *Rodhah* slowly descended from her high chair, and took her place upon a rostrum, standing.

Someone blew on a horn, and she threw aside her white cloak, and stood revealed there, entirely naked.

There was a rustle among the assembled males, and I saw that every man had possessed himself of a dagger which he carried in his right hand. The Assassins had been born again, and, believe me, the spectacle in that underground vault, lighted as it was only by the indifferent illumination of smoking torches, was a terrifying one.

We were surrounded by drugged brains, and by men of low intelligence. Scanned thus, they seemed not far removed from the animal, and I could not forget that these animals had strangers in their midst.

I need hardly add that no European could have gained admittance to this seance. Had we, of course, been Europeans, there would have been no service of adoration in the first instance, for no European would have willingly remained among these degenerates, and most certainly would not have provided the hashish which made this spectacle possible.

Quite apart from this, the reluctance which was manifested against our admission would have been intensified in the case of Westerners. Certainly no European has ever seen the service of adoration, and none is ever likely to be accorded the experience.

The *Rodhah* stood there motionless, her charms revealed to all, and the men, with their daggers held aloft, bent their heads in adoration.

This was the Assassin service for the increase of fecundity, and—old men, young men, middle-aged men, all were the same, all gazed with adoring eyes upon those virgin charms and believed that they were absorbing power into their own loins.

That they really believed was beyond question.

What their drug-racked brains saw beyond the naked outline of a woman I know not ; but on every face there was a stamp of belief.

These men were absorbing power which would be later dissipated within the seclusion of their own miserable hovels.

As I gazed, I became aware that there was a party of some thirty young men who had remained apart from the others. These youths remained kneeling, and they carried their daggers in their left hands.

I saw something else which I had not noticed before. From within the right ear each of the others had withdrawn a hair. It was held between the finger and thumb of the left hand, and it was drawn, with some degree of unison, across the forehead ; then horizontally from breast to breast.

The party of youths were without these strange devices ; then I realised that they were initiates.

Presently, they were marshalled in line, and with their daggers still in their left hands, they advanced upon the *Rodhah* still standing motionless upon her slight dais.

The first in line halted, and knelt before her, and he offered the hilt of his dagger. Then he rose, and kissed the girl passionately upon each of her naked breasts. He took a step backwards, and contemplated her thighs in adoration for some thirty seconds while the assembly maintained an utter silence.

Ceremoniously, he carried his dagger from his left hand to his right, then carefully cut a hair from the virgin's head.

He held it aloft in silence, bared his own chest and conveyed it thither while he chanted a short stanza. Then, raising the hair to his lips, he kissed it, and carefully lodged it within his ear.

Each of the initiates did the same, believing, as did all the one-time Assassins there present, that he was absorbing sexual power by the performance of the rite.

It was a strange and eerie scene, for it was conducted with a solemnity which in other surroundings would have appeared farcial.

There were no beating of drums in Masyad that night, and there was no activity out of doors. All the males of this extraordinary community were otherwise engaged.

CHAPTER VIII

LAND OF THE NAUTCH GIRLS

SOME years ago the world was shocked by the story of Mumtaz Begum.

Mumtaz was a nautch girl who had danced her way into the heart of a proud and powerful Indian Prince. Jewels worth fortunes were festooned over her lovely shoulders! there were priceless pearls to adorn her ears and her nose. On her arms were innumerable bangles where diamonds shone dazzlingly; around her ankles bands of gold and platinum in which were set in bewildering profusion, huge rubies, amethysts, and a profusion of the other coloured gems.

Mumtaz tired of the exotic life of the palace, and she sought to make her escape. She succeeded in journeying to Bombay, and—she took with her the jewels which had been showered upon her. She walked with a veritable fortune, yet she drifted into Bombay's seething multitudes, and was by no means conspicuous.

Those who had been sent to waylay and kidnap her, and to return her fragrance and her loveliness once more to this ruler's superbly appointed palace, had received orders not to fail in their quest, and though Mumtaz had seemingly become part of the human landscape, they were men who must seek in the knowledge that they dare not return empty-handed.

They found her on one of the main streets of Bombay—a thoroughfare usually crowded with the motors of Europeans and rich Parsees; a thoroughfare, broad, well lighted, well policed, and where anything more exciting than a runaway gharri-pony was apt to be regarded as an event. It was a thoroughfare which inspired decorum, where haste and speed was taboo, and where all the influential residents of Bombay took the air.

The quiet seemliness of this stately road was suddenly pierced by long drawn-out shrieks. There were fiercely uttered oaths, and shrill feminine screams. Lethal weapons were brought into play, and there was rich, red blood flowing.

Mumtaz Begum fought hard for her freedom, and a first-class scandal was exposed which was eventually to mean that a great Princely figure must vacate his throne and leave the land of his birth to exist in exile.

Here in Mumtaz Begum we have but one class of the nautch girls of the East. She was of a class of great courtesans—women of culture and of refinement and of wit, and of course, of outstanding beauty.

Girls coming within a different category often exercise a great influence upon the powerful men whose playthings they are. Often they secure power, and in many of the Indian States their influence is greater than that of the Diwan, or the ruler's principal adviser.

These are the women who are loaded with riches, and who live a life of voluptuous luxury. Their merest whim is a command until . . .! Often their death comes suddenly, and when their bodies are discovered the knees are found drawn high up to the chin, and the

features tell of a passing of supreme anguish. Poison and powdered glass play havoc with the intestines, and death does not always come quickly.

At the other end of the scale are the nautch girls of the temples. Miss Katherine Mayo has written largely of this class—of girls who are bequeathed to the temples by their parents, and whose young life is dedicated to a faith in which one of the principal features is adoration of the male organ.

These girls go to the temples at an early age, and are taught the mystic and voluptuous dances which emphasise the sexual side of life. When they are ripe—and this comes at a remarkably early age—they are called to the service of their deity, and they lie with the priest who has favoured them with his selection.

Thereafter, they are little more than temple prostitutes, and they remain so until the years rob them of some of their allure, and though they continue to haunt the temple precincts, they become little more than public prostitutes.

With neither of these types have we any immediate concern.

There remains a third class—those nautch girls whose province it is to amuse the man who will pay—girls who can sing, and perform the exotic evolutions of the Eastern dance, and who can take to the couch a full and complete technique.

These girls can be found in a number of establishments in Bombay, and they are always available. They may be hired in troupes, and they will visit the houses of clients, and enter with verve into the fulness of the night.

These girls are exponents of an age-old art, and there is not one of the thousand and one sexual "exercises" set out in the *Kumasastra* which they do not know, and do not practice.

With these girls and their clients there is nothing of the gloomy, joyless union which comes of contact with a paid paramour of the West. They delight in subtlety, and the actual act of union is perhaps the least of the pleasures which they retail.

They are adepts at amorous intimacy, and they proceed to their assignments full of life and zest. Their life, incidentally, is not a long one—their sexual life, that is—because of the abandon with which they consume aphrodisiacs.

They are amazing creatures who can thrill, rob and blackmail, and regard it as all part of the night's work. Generally, they are creatures to be avoided, but their number indicates that their trade must flourish, and that there are many who are ready and willing to accept the risks which accompany the sampling of sexual delights.

One night the Khan and I were invited to a large party which was given in an immense house in Malabar. It had been hired for the occasion, and our host, a man of money and erotic tastes, had provided fully for the amusement of his guests.

There was the usual troupe of nautch girls, and they sang and danced for us throughout a lengthy evening. To me it was rather a boring exhibition, for even the most suggestive dances can pall with repetition.

It was evident, however, that our host had some-

thing more than usual in the way of entertainment, and the Khan and I remained.

We and the girls were served with many sherbets, and white clad servants glided among us the whole time bearing a variety of sweetmeats. Some of the latter had a curious flavour, but they were far from being unpalatable. Indeed, I remarked upon the delicate piquancy of one, and complimented our host upon the resourcefulness of his cook.

He merely smiled.

It was not much later that I began to discern a growing restlessness among the guests, all of whom it goes without saying were male, and a decided excess of animation among the nautch girls.

I too began to feel a restlessness within myself, and I had to admit that my boredom had mysteriously vanished. I began to regard the nautch girls with a far less critical eyes, and for me the night took on a far more roseate hue.

As for the Khan, his movements too indicated an inner restlessness, and his expression, always somewhat sensual, was now openly lascivious.

Our host, for his part, began pacing the room like a caged tiger, and there were obviously moments when he too underwent acute distress.

I realised that the party's tempo was quickening.

Our host suddenly stopped his frenzied prancing, and struck a gong.

Standing in the middle of the room, with only the whirring of the overhead electric fans to break the silence, he contemplated his guests with a smile. Then he spoke.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I have seen to the pleasures of the evening. All of you have eaten, I think, and all that remains for me to tell you is that you have partaken of more than sweetmeats!"

There were strained looks as our host broke this news, for this man was notorious for his practical jokes, and he would have thought nothing of dosing his guests with the fiercest of laxatives just for the pleasure of observing their distress.

But we had been spared laxatives, if only to have absorbed of something far worse.

Our host waited for the effects of his words to sink home, and continued:

"Gentlemen, in our sweetmeats there was a generous supply of Royal —, and of the strength prescribed for 'Princes and rich men only.'"

Our host was then quoting from an advertisement for a powerful aphrodisiac which appears in the majority of the newspapers of India with a hundred like preparations, all guaranteed to restore strength to the vitiated, and to increase the virility of the normal.

The vernacular press of India is notorious for this form of advertisement. They enter into a detailed description of the effects which it is claimed they can produce, and in a manner which would be embarrassing to the European mind.

Advertisements of such a revealing nature would never be accepted by the normal Western Press, but in India, such is the demand for these restoratives that many newspapers derive their principal revenue from the thousands of manufacturers dotted all over the country, but principally in the south, all of whom pro-

duce nostrums guaranteed to restore fertility to the aged, prolonged delights to the strong, and nothing less than new internals to those who have long been sterile.

Childless women are the principal buyers of these aphrodisiacs, and elderly men come next. The commodity which I have mentioned is excessively dear, and is beyond the pocket of the peasant and the middle-class. It is intended primarily for those who wish to prolong the sexual act, and to live a night of amorous delights without undue fatigue. In a manner it produces in men many of the characteristics of the eunuchs of Istanbul. The sexual act can be prolonged for an hour, if need be, but in this instance it is the man who dictates the tempo, and not the woman.

Our host's announcement would not have unduly perturbed me had he stopped there, but he stood there smiling, and it was obvious that he had not finished.

Knowing his reputation I wondered what else he had introduced into his sweetmeats.

We had not long to wait for the denouement.

"Gentlemen," he went on, "you will be pleased to hear that I have added an additional delight for your delectation!"

Again he paused, and he certainly achieved his effect.

To my horror, at least, he explained that in addition to the Royal — we had eaten quantities of a mixture, the principal component of which was Spanish fly, or cantharides as it is known to chemists.

The majority of the guests received this information

with loud and ribald jest. It explained the increasing restlessness within them, but——

To one who had some knowledge of the action of these drugs—and our host had more than a passing acquaintance, otherwise he could hardly have conceived this odd entertainment—so much depended upon the amount absorbed.

On the one hand there was something which would defer final satisfaction, and on the other something which would strongly urge continued effort.

To have two warring substances fighting for supremacy in one's body was one thing; to cogitate on their probable reactions was another.

Would one cancel out the other, or would they combine in producing a night of delirious sensuality?

No wonder our host smiled. He had undertaken a dangerous experiment, and his only saving grace lay in the fact that he had not spared himself.

During the course of my life I have indulged in many strange experiences, but never one more bizarre than that which I lived through then.

I attempted, not with much success, to recall the number of sweetmeats I had eaten, and which of their number had had that high distinguishable flavour.

My brain reeled under the thought, because it was quite impossible to determine which of the delicacies had contained one drug, or the other.

I am afraid that I sat there with very mixed feelings somewhat like a small boy who has been liberally dosed with castor oil, and awaiting the inevitable conclusion.

Our host had been quite fatalistic in his entertain-

ment. He had not attempted to differentiate between the two drugs; there had been no effort to strike a balance, and even he did not know who had had an excess of one or the other.

The situation was crammed with the most alarming possibilities.

I will not attempt to describe the insensate revels of that wildly unreal night.

That they were intense can be surmised, but our host had taken small thought of the consequences.

It is impossible lightly to play with substances such as I have described, and it is literally criminal to mix them, and especially when no regard is paid either to the age or the physique of the victim.

There was one elderly man of the party who could never resist sweet dishes, and he had eaten liberally. Within his age-weakened frame these unwholesome drugs fought a war with this old man's life as the prize.

Several other guests were afflicted in a lesser manner and in the end had to receive medical assistance. Two were immediately conveyed to nursing homes for urgent treatment.

What, it will be asked, happened in my case?

As soon as I realised the excessively liberal character of our host's hospitality, and had observed some of the wild excesses which it was producing, I made a supreme effort of will and earned the bitter reproaches of a Bombay nautch girl for all time. She too had liberally eaten of the sweetmeats, and her appetite was insatiable. Yet, there comes a time when the brain must fight against the voluptuous. It cannot entirely

surrender itself to the dictates of the body, for once it does therein lies madness.

I admit that it required a supreme effort of will, but I succeeded.

I hurried from that house in Malabar, and sought out an apothecary known to me. He could not supply me with an antidote to the noxious mixtures within me, and which were racking my body and my nervous system almost beyond physical endurance, but he could provide me with a soporific which slowed down the action of my racing pulse and damped down the burning desire which consumed my brain. The bodily urge remained, but the realisation of its presence was dimmed.

I took this man's capsules, and hastened back to the house where I sought out the Khan. He received me with a variety of oaths, and a stern injunction to remove myself to Hades, but I persisted. I succeeded in inducing him to take some of the capsules, and soon I, at least, was asleep.

Those hours of so-called rest were easily the worst I have ever experienced. I was disturbed by the most alarming dreams, and often I would awaken to a semi-consciousness to find myself in a sodden bath of perspiration. Still, my brain and my body were at least spared some of the worst effects of the licentious abandon of those who remained awake.

The Khan and I were wrecks for weeks after this essentially unhealthy experience, and we both had to receive medical attention.

It was a stern lesson to me of the harm which can come of the promiscuous use of aphrodisiacs. Fortun-

ately, of the great variety of these substances on the market, both in the East and in the West, the majority are quite harmless if only because they are "quack" productions and signally fail to engender the effects claimed by the manufacturers. Nevertheless, there are a number of drugs, and in every case those which have been known for their efficiency throughout the centuries, which can over excite.

The methods whereby these nautch girls secure money from their clients are manifold and tortuous. They are precluded from adopting the forms of blackmail open to their Western counterparts. It is, of course, possible to secure photographs of a man taken in a compromising position, and to retain letters of assignation which one can threaten to display before interested parties, but none of these things would produce money.

There is no social stigma attaching to consorting with women of this character, and the custom is so much part of the life of men who can afford to purchase this form of amusement that it would evoke not the smallest protest from their wives. Quite apart from the wife holding a position somewhat different from the wives of the West, merely to lie with a woman of the bazaar would be regarded as a venial sin.

As for Indian society, it would merely laugh at the girl who attempted to make capital by advertising her profession, and if money beyond the ordinary emoluments is to be derived from this particular form of prostitution, other and more devious means have to be evolved.

As I have indicated, the *Kumasatra* speaks of a thousand and one delights, and the variants of love-making there prescribed lead to such an astonishingly close intimacy, and to such prolonged amorous exercises, that tongues wag and secrets of a valuable nature are frequently disclosed by a drug-racked man.

Even in respect to the kiss—a very ordinary procedure when performed by ordinary exponents of the pastime, these women, well learned in the *Kumasatra*, can introduce a hundred shades of intensity, each well calculated to produce the required effect upon an amorous male.

These women, learned as they are, however, do not entirely depend upon their own allure.

Often a man servant can be seen strutting through the streets of Bombay bearing a coloured sandal. Age-old custom has decreed that he should, for the sandal is the repository of the aphrodisiacs for which some nautch girl has sent to excite a flaccid client.

Here, in the ancient law of custom, we see some relation to the shoe which appears so frequently in so many Western exotic entertainments. It is a well-known fact that a high-heeled woman's shoe can excite some men, even when there is no foot inside it, and that Western prostitutes normally wear garish footgear in the well-founded understanding that a well-turned ankle has frequently a greater value upon their market than a carefully made-up face.

Actually, no man, whether Oriental or Occidental, is safe within the establishments where these nautch girls congregate. If he goes there with money or valuables, he will surely be robbed, and if he has enough courage

to complain, he will be countered by a blatant and vehement denial that he had the stolen objects upon him when he entered.

Little can be done in such circumstances, for whether European or otherwise, the outraged client will have difficulty in marshalling his thoughts. In the case of a European, he will have been drugged, even if he has only sampled a small whisky from a branded bottle opened in his presence.

Those behind the nautch-girl racket know how to insinuate their dope into a seemingly unopened bottle, and only the initiated can determine how it is done.

Normally, a hole is bored in the base of the bottle, and he who comes first is lucky, for he actually receives whisky of the type advertised on the label. That it is impregnated with a soporific is another matter.

When the bottle is empty, it is not thrown away. The hole is rebored, and spirit of local manufacture is poured in. The whole is restoppered by the quick application of a tiny blow lamp, and only a tiny bump in the surface of the glass will tell the wary that all is not well.

In the case of those who are not Europeans, and who incline the more easily to drugs and other amatory expedients, the labour is less, and the financial results usually somewhat better.

There are few Indians, for instance, who have not a law suit on their hands, and those who are unwilling to talk on the subject are outside the ordinary rut. For many a recourse to law is a sign of social prestige, and therefore something to be advertised and commented upon.

Nautch girls, adepts in their art, make their clients talk too freely, and as there is much in Indian law which is dubious, it is usually only necessary to threaten to approach the opposite side in a law suit for the unfortunate man to pay, and pay heavily.

Here, the nautch girls do not enter into negotiations themselves. They allow their clients to leave their embraces with all the reluctance laid down by the *Kumasatra*, but it is not long before they approach men brokers who keep close contact with these establishments, and who buy the information outright from the nautch girls, trusting to fortune and their own clandestine methods for the recuperation which usually comes a hundred-fold.

Before we left Bombay—and I shall have more to say regarding Bombay's underworld apart from the nautch girl element—the Khan actually accepted another invitation extended by our host of the too glamorous night.

Fortunately, the Khan found other distractions in the early part of the evening, but he remembered his appointment as the night wore on.

We motored to the house in Malabar, and when we were admitted a most astonishing sight met our eyes.

There were over twenty girls in the principal room, and a like number of men.

Our host, in an advanced state of inebriation, was standing upon a table, and he was neighing like a horse. He was in a state of complete nudity, and so were the girls and his guests. Our host was the leader of the revels and the dancing girls were prancing around the room with utter abandon.

Some of the scenes we then witnessed were exceedingly boisterous, and nobody noticed our departure when we slipped away after having seen more than enough of this fantastic performance.

CHAPTER IX

STREET OF A THOUSAND LOST SOULS

THERE is one street in Bombay which is entirely given over to prostitution. I do not think I exaggerate when I say that here are to be found at least a thousand women parading their charms, and it is a street which begins with the merely sordid and ends with the bestial.

Here women can be had for the asking for as little as two annas, or twopence, and then they consider themselves well paid, as indeed they are, for this is prostitution at its very lowest ebb, and man must indeed be an animal to conjure up the desire to cohabit with such unfortunates.

The street begins with the houses of the elite of this very depressed underworld. Here seamen congregate, soldiers, and the not too particular business men of the European quarter.

The ladies of the elite inhabit ground floor drawing-rooms which seemingly have no fourth wall in that these apartments are entirely open to the street. Here they lounge and eat, and when fortune has come their way, drink and swear, and otherwise comport themselves in silken finery which they are at all times willing to remove when their fingers have clasped a ten rupee note. In other words, their price is roughly fifteen shillings. For this amount they will conduct a client

to the rear rooms and, with tired, frozen smiles, submit woodenly to their partner's desires. They possess none of the finesse of the nautch girls, and desire none. They regard males as animals willing to give up a ten rupee note for a few minutes' dubious satisfaction.

If the client can be induced to pay exorbitant prices for liquor—here it is the “pukka” thing—so much the better. They will become a little more animated, for the sale of drink in such circumstances is decidedly more profitable than resorting to the couch, and for as long as the man is content to pay about ten times as much as his drinks are worth, he may remain. The moment his stream of notes ceases to flow all interest evaporates, and the man is required to leave.

The whole affair is completely without sentiment; it is not redeemed by one single caress that is worth the name, money alone counts, and the man pays for and gets little more than a mechanical means to satisfaction.

It is a matter for amazement among Easterns that Westerners should regard the delights of the bed so sadly. Even the much vaunted Latins know but little of the technique, and any really enthusiastic Bombay nautch girl could take Paris by storm, and become a Montmartre Queen.

And the women of this quarter—I am now referring to the so-called elite—not only are they cold and mercenary, but they are crude.

There are several Russians, some sweepings from the dockland of Marseilles, and a number of dubious nationality who have made their way *via* the dens of the Levant and the Near East.

One cannot really expect much of such women, but when one reflects that they are there for a purpose, and that the principal one is financial, one would suppose that they would make an effort to espouse some of the rudimentary refinements of their trade.

The Khan and I have spoken to many of these women of this street of the damned, and always have we been repelled by the smallness of their minds, their utter lack of intelligent conversation, and their amazing ability to deal with men and prostitution in the abstract.

One such woman, still with some pretensions to looks, we took out for a motor ride, and she sufficiently unbent to unfold for us a little of her psychology.

She admitted that she might have as many as ten or twelve clients a day. Sometimes, when parties of roisterers invaded the street, she might entertain as many as four or five men in half-an-hour.

She actually laughed when we suggested that without some of the medical aids to love with which the East abounds, such a performance might be found excessively fatiguing, and she was coldly insistent upon the fact that her part in these illicit partnerships was entirely mechanical, and that she had long since ceased to derive any satisfaction from them.

Nothing within her cold soul was touched by these male approaches, and her one thrill was when some bibulous visitor overpaid her, or forgot to ask for change.

A little further down this street are to be found the best of the half-castes—those who with an almost pathetic optimism seek, with powder and cosmetics, to

obscure the darker side of their heritage. These too live and have their being in tawdry salons which are minus a fourth wall, and, like a shop, are only entirely enclosed with the addition of shutters when all business is over for the night.

Beyond them—and well beyond—are other half-castes, and those for whom the accenutation of the lighter side of their make-up would be a hopeless quest. These are women content to receive the equivalent of half a crown, and the only thing to be said for them is that they endeavour to give value for their money. They have to—these poor unfortunates; otherwise they would speedily lack custom.

Between these two segments of a people so closely allied, and claiming precedence over the darker, are to be found Japanese, complete with their butterfly kimonos, and their white socks and intriguing sandals.

These women, curiously vivacious, do not live a life of semi-publicity. They prefer the first storey of the houses of this street of ill-fame, and if they look from behind their green shuttered windows, they will smile, but not otherwise solicit. Their price is half of that of the white women of the quarter of the elite, and their principal attraction for those who visit them is their almost excessive cleanliness. They will never make love to a client before bathing.

These women bring to their profession just a semblence of the voluptuousness of the East, and because of this they are much favoured by the seamen who visit the neighbourhood. Compared with the ice blocks in the white quarter, they are virile enthusiasts fired with a ripe appreciation of male vigour.

As one proceeds along this street one descends in the social scale. At one end one is reasonably safe. At the other one is jostled, and a tight hold has to be retained on any pocket book. Dress, or any other indication of wealth, is to invite attentions from the hangers-on to this underworld, and to a discreet and effective tap over the head there is no argument.

In the case of a European he can hardly complain to the police with any force. He went knowingly into the district, and he is disinclined to face the publicity which would attend successful police action.

Orientalists of the better class seldom venture so far. In the first place they have no need to probe such depths to discover what they require, and in the second, that to be found there is frankly revolting.

As one proceeds along this street the facades of the houses gradually change. From the well appointed drawing-rooms of the whites—drawing-rooms with an airy spaciousness and with perhaps the refinements of electric fans—the places of assignment become smaller, and less ornate, until in the last third of the street one is confronted with tiny dark apartments, the walls of which are plastered with the dried cow-dung of the peasantry. The couch within a noisome inner chamber is nothing more than a mud platform ornamented with the same substance.

Here the apartments are open to the street, but not as are the white drawing-rooms half a mile away. The women crowded there are behind bars, and the atmosphere is so staggeringly repulsive that one thinks instinctively of the Zoo.

Yet those bars are not there to keep the inmates within. They are there to keep in check a horde of hungry males who, without them, would devour their fancy without first disbursing the requisite two annas.

As one passes by these bars one is assailed by a shrill clatter of raucous feminine voices. If one turns one's head, women nearest the bars will posture, and raise their dirty shifts fully to display their wares.

There is an entire absence of false modesty, for with the raising of the shift the price is declaimed, and I am inclined to think, with our Oriental disposition to bargain, that the patient could secure the wares for even less than the two pence habitually demanded.

This is a street for the animals among men, for there is positively nothing there to raise prostitution above that level where animals congregate during the rutting season. There is not one single atom of mental refinement, and merely to visit it and to stare is to come away with but the poorest opinion of humanity.

Here humans are literally degraded to the condition of animals. In the lowest quarter the inmates are actually caged, and the man who enters is caged also.

I have seen what I term, for want of a better name, purely mechanical prostitution elsewhere, but never on the scale to be found in this street of a thousand women, and never, I think, with such a blatant appeal to the lower animal instincts.

It is perhaps typical of Bombay, for here one finds such a melange of types. Men congregate here from all parts of the world. All have desires, but by no means all have money.

There are instances of this purely mechanical sub-

stitute for amours in other parts of the Bombay Presidency where, despite regulations to the contrary, the old system of the "bull-ring" still survives.

These are places which were once set apart for the edification of British troops who, with their accustomed gift for easy nomenclature, gave these centres the perhaps not inappropriate title which I have mentioned.

The "bull-rings" were closed by official order, yet it seems that they still have inmates who have a regular clientele among the troops. Unfortunately, the British soldier in India is not well paid, and it is usual for him to receive the sum of five rupees (approximately seven shillings) every Friday afternoon. This sum does not allow much margin for indulging in illicit pleasures, and even the half rupee demanded by the ladies of the "bull-rings" makes a formidable hole in his week's money.

Perhaps it would be better for the soldier were his pay day staggered, but regulations say that he must be paid on Fridays; therefore, on Fridays many hundred men congregated in a single station are temporarily relieved from the trammels of penury.

I remember once passing through Kirkee on a Friday afternoon. There is a large arsenal, and a considerable British garrison.

I stopped within the small village of Kirkee, and I saw a mud-walled hovel. It was no different from many others, but it attracted the attention because there was a queue of some twenty British soldiers lined up with military precision, two deep. There was no superior there to maintain order, but I suppose a com-

bination of the British readiness to queue and the soldier's automatic discipline, served to produce this curious air of waiting docility, and patience.

I sat in my car drinking milk from an earthen vessel, for I had stopped at Kirkee to quench my thirst. At intervals of three or four minutes the crazy wooden door of the hovel would open, and a British soldier would emerge, more often than not still attending to his dress. As he sought the sunlight he would utter not a word to his comrades, but would hurry away, and his foot was no sooner off the doorstep than another soldier entered, and the queue was one less.

I asked the man who had sold me milk the meaning of this strange exhibition, and with a smile he informed me that it was the British soldier's pay-day. He seemed to consider that that was sufficient explanation, but I was curious.

I discovered, to my astonishment, that that hovel contained one room, and one mud-made dais which did duty as a couch. It was occupied by one woman, and she was ready to accommodate as many as cared to call upon her.

Of course, as the soldier's pay is almost invariably dissipated on the day of receipt, she had an entire week to recuperate from her exceedingly arduous labours.

Away from Bombay this excessively commercial atmosphere does not strike home with such intensity, and the houses of assignation which exist are by no means the sole perquisite of the non-commissioned ranks.

In point of fact, Bangalore teems with houses of commercialised love, but none is advertised, and out-

wardly at least, the inmates are eminently respectable.

Elsewhere—in Allahabad particularly—there are many homes open to the initiated, and almost invariably one finds there a large family of Eurasian girls who can best be described as amateurs with highly developed professional instincts.

These women accept money with avidity, and indeed have no other source of income, and they maintain a kind of open house in which prostitution, although a concomitant, is not necessarily the principal reason why they possess such a wide circle of male acquaintances.

They are houses where gramophones blare and pianos tinkle into the small hours, and where drink flows freely, and at prices not much above those demanded in a first-class hotel.

The bedrooms are always available for those who desire intimate female acquaintanceship, but the air of commercial blatancy is absent. There exists at least the fiction of being “introduced” to these women, and amorous topics are approached with a certain decorum and with a delicacy which both parties know to be entirely synthetic and nothing more than a sop to almost non-existent proprieties. This formula, however, does at least raise the level of prostitution beyond that of the accosting girl of Piccadilly, or the foully debauched animalism of that ghastly street in Bombay.

To many of the officers who sometimes visit these places, the whole affair is nothing more than a “lark” into which sensual considerations hardly enter, and it is possible to enter these places as a “paying guest,” and

merely partake of the amusement and the liquor provided by the establishment without once being reminded that there is another and more intimate side to life.

These establishments, known only to the military commissioned ranks, are especially popular in the hot weather when all cantonment women have left the station, and there is a ceaseless round of oppressively hot nights of unrelieved boredom to be endured.

I remember being taken to one of these establishments by a crowd of officer roisterers. I had become one of the party at the local cinema where I was recognised by a major who had once been in the political service. With excessive *bon hommie* he introduced me to a lively coterie who admitted my presence with loud and alcoholic cheers.

A Douglas Fairbanks film was being shown, and this roused the sense of emulation in some of the younger officers. I happened to look round, and there, hanging from the ironwork of the balcony, and with their bodies dangling precariously over the patrons thirty feet below, were half a dozen youths performing breath-taking gymnastics which were a fair imitation of those already demonstrated by the film star.

The orchestra attracted the attention of the more musically inclined—this was no sound picture—and almost before I realised it sundry of the party had leaped the intervening brass rail, had dispossessed the players of their instruments, and were producing a weird symphony of all the sounds of Hell.

A frightened manager sent for the police, and a Indian police havildar appeared with five policemen

With military precision they marched down the central aisle, and approached the unofficial instrumentalists. It chanced that the perspiring performer on the big drum was a local police officer.

The havildar marched his men up to the rail, called "Halt" in a fierce parade-ground voice, and saluted his officer.

The drummer went on with his frenzied beating, but deigned to look up.

"Hullo, havildar," he said pleasantly, "what do you want?"

The policeman hesitated, then waving a deprecating hand, summed up the situation.

Following a barked "About turn!" to his small army, he gave the order, "Quick march," and to the strains of a delirious, discordant medley of ear-splitting sound, the police marched out again with a kind of dreadfully solemn, military woodenness. Not a quiver or even a smile appeared on the faces of these impassive upholders of the law. I could only surmise that the cinema manager had had occasion to call them in before.

When we left the cinema, in deference to the repeated exhortations of the manager, we tumbled into the worst collection of cars I have seen. I have often wondered why the officer fraternity in India maintain such sorry conveyances, but I learned the reason why that night.

All the cars were tourers of ancient vintage, but the engine of each was tuned up to the last notch, even if some lacked upholstery, and faded hoods hung drunkenly behind.

Five, six, seven or more humans crowded into each vehicle when some mad spirit suggested a race in reverse to —.

The proposition was received with acclaim, and I had the maddest ride over a distance of more than two miles that I have ever experienced.

We went into the ditches, we hit telegraph posts, and there were dozens of collisions, but miraculously, all the cars arrived at their destination, and as it was impossible for any to look worse than when they started, any damage that might have been sustained was difficult to estimate.

I was formally "introduced" to the feminine inmates of the house which we entered, and whisky began to flow like a stream.

I well remember that there was a young regimental doctor among the party, and I retain a vision. It is of a very white-faced man with long black hair, a dank lock of which fell drunkenly over one eye. This gentleman had been a leader of the revels, and his white drill mess kit had suffered. One sleeve of his tunic was entirely missing, and the lower half of one leg of his trousers had been torn away to reveal an inch of naked calf above a gaping, patent Wellington boot.

He was standing upon the piano dolefully singing an air which I was assured was Irish. Another young ruffian was leaning against the piano and was looking soulfully up into the face of the lugubrious singer while with wicked abandon he poured whisky and soda into the inviting top of the Wellington.

This scene was terminated by the arrival of an orderly, who loudly demanded the doctor.

The singer, immediately sobered, displayed some apprehension.

How the devil, he demanded, did the orderly know he was in such a place?

The orderly smiled, but reserved his thoughts. He handed a note to the doctor, who assured us that he must immediately leave.

There was a confinement case in the married lines.

Although still reeling when he left, I was assured the next day that the birth had been entirely successful.

During the whole of the time I was in this establishment not one of the officers left for the bedrooms. They were there solely for alcoholic enjoyment, and I can testify to the fact that they got it.

CHAPTER X

AMONG TERRORISTS AND OTHERS

WITH the Khan I paid a visit to some so-called Turkish baths. I make the description allegorical because I can think of none better.

The baths in question are of ancient design, and they are in one of the principal cities of India. One pursues one's way through a thoroughfare always crowded, dodging goats, Brahmanic bulls, and humans alike. Ancient trams of Victorian design clang at one's elbow, and if one knows, one comes to a tiny alley, no less dirty or noisome than the rest. It is perhaps a yard wide, and it seemingly ends in a brick wall. One goes down the alley, and one finds a doorway. There are the Turkish baths.

This description of the venue will be recognised by many who have visited these baths, for many a European obtains a vicarious thrill by a nocturnal sampling of the waters. To those who recognise the establishment the following will cause some surprise; those who have not, will not, I hope, find it altogether uninteresting.

I describe these baths as Turkish because of their conception. Actually, of course, they are Moghul. There is the vaulted dome, the marble slabs to receive the bodies of the bathers, and a number of rooms of

varying temperature. Yet they differ from baths which I have visited beyond the Oxus. There, the water was heated by the ancient and primitive method of plunging red-hot stones into water receptacles. Here there is an ancient conduit system, and the water is heated by wood in the bowels of the place.

The average European visiting this establishment finds just what he expects to find. The appointments are somewhat primitive, but the excess of water renders everything clean. He goes there for a bath in the Turkish style, and he receives one, with full value for money.

Two giant men will receive his person after he has donned the smallest of garments. This is like a cloth fig-leaf to which two tapes have been attached. These men place him on the marble floor with a small strip of hollowed wood as a neck rest. They dip brass lotas into basins attached to the walls and douche him with water. They scrub him furiously, and while his eyes are full of soap, they seize his limbs and contort them. The arm is pulled out at full length, and a tug is given. The bather feels a slight snap in the region of his shoulder blade. The fingers are treated likewise, and there follows a slight snap in each of the five main joints.

When the other arm has been treated, the attendants attack the legs. They clutch the foot, and pull; then bend the distended member over their knee, and there is another slight snap. They give a similar performance upon the toes, only here the bending is done over a thumb.

They sit the bather upright on the floor, and throw

a knee over his shoulder. They turn the spine spirally, and there is a slight click in the hollow of the back. A knee is thrown over the other shoulder, and the bather is turned in the reverse direction, and again until his spine creaks.

When these men have performed their ministrations, the bather is not only amazingly clean, but astonishingly supple, notwithstanding the somewhat terrifying character of his experiences.

The bather is draped in huge towels, and is conducted to another apartment where he is allowed to cool off. Eventually, he leaves, having added something to his experiences.

This is one side of the picture.

There are others.

For the European the bathing is as I have described it. For others, it can be somewhat more erotic.

The male attendants perform their wrestling upon the victim before the actual ablution. They merely douche his body with water before entering upon their gymnastics. When this is done, they discreetly retire, and their place is taken by naked girls who enter the apartment giggling, and smiling. Their number depends upon the length of the purse of the bather; two is a minimum; a dozen by no means unusual.

They descend upon the bather, and with an extreme delicacy of touch, remove his one feeble garment; and then they proceed to wash him, and massage him.

Their technique is different from that of the male attendants, and it is lengthy. The bather remains upon the floor, sometimes upon his face, and sometimes upon

his back, but always light, deft fingers are playing with some portion of his anatomy.

The bathing rites are prolonged, again according to the purse of the bather, and these young females, all of whom are selected for their looks and the symmetry of their bodies, are adepts.

As the bath proceeds one begins to realise that the girls are really in competition. They are vying with each other not only to pander to the most sensual male reactions, but by sheer animal personality to carry their feminine charms to a plane beyond the others.

Their province within the bath chamber is tittilation. Their reward is the man, and all seek earnestly for his preference, for this means more money.

Sometimes the girls are disappointed, and a remark by the principal attendant when the Khan and I entered the establishment made it clear that this was by no means an unusual occurrence.

While he was detailing the delights of the bath, and his terms for that which could be provided, he informed us with a nonchalance born of much repetition that a boy, or boys, to be in attendance when the girls had concluded their "massage," would be so much extra. He extolled the excellence of these lads, and insisted that they were the finest exponents of their craft.

When the Khan and I left the baths I saw several youths waiting in an ante-room. By mistake I had lifted the wrong curtain. I caught the chief attendant's eye, and I raised an interrogative eyebrow. He nodded. I gave the youths but a cursory glance, yet one face stamped itself upon my memory.

The majority of the youths had the rounded, hairless

faces of their kind, and the eyes lacked lustre and were slightly vacuous. In this one instance, however, the sensuous fought with strength, and the eyes were bright, and gleaming.

I was destined to see that face again.

This is but a brief reference to the homosexual, and rather an oblique one, but if my references to this subject have been meagre it is only because it has not come within my province, and certainly not because the homosexual is a rarity in the East.

Away across the Indus, where the ratio of women to men is very lop-sided, homosexuality is not only frequent in practice, but is largely accepted as normal.

There is a Hillman's marching song which can be heard frequently along the border, and its principal theme is that "There is a boy across the river." This is ground out in the guttural language with a resonance and force which leaves no doubt in the minds of the hearers as to the bodily dictates of the singers.

These men are homosexual largely because of the difficulty which exists in obtaining partners of the opposite sex, but the easy manner in which these men fall into this habit, and the youthful age at which they begin its practice, always reminds me of the fact that without question many of these stalwart tribesmen have the blood of Alexander the Great's legionaries in their veins, and that implies much.

With them homosexuality is innate, but this form of perversion does not blind them to the attributes of the opposite sex as the very frequent kidnapping of girls goes readily to show.

Homosexuality is not unknown in the British navy,

to judge by many authenticated accounts, and the British newspapers make it evident from time to time that there are certain British regiments which not only harbour addicts, but even those who are ready to sell their bodies for gain. Generally speaking, however, my observations have gone to show that there is little homosexuality in England, and that could a census of addicts be taken the percentage would be remarkably small compared with those who conduct themselves normally.

I cannot, however, say the same of the Indian army, where the practice is rife and calls for little comment. Yet the few British officers attached to Indian regiments generally have no conception of what transpires in the lines, in the shade of the bivouac fires, or even in the mule or bullock lines.

There is no question of the fact that Eastern foods lend themselves to a frequent practice of the sexual act. The curries, and the spices, not to mention various drugs, have their effect. In Western lands the properties, for instance, are exceedingly well-known, and there is much more than pepper in the average curry.

I was referring specifically to one of these homosexuals, and I said that I was to meet him again.

It was in Kurkura that the reunion, if it can be called that, took place, and in the house of an Indian lawyer of that city.

At first I could not "place" him, and I spent the best part of an evening delving into my brain and endeavouring to answer the question as to where I had seen this face before.

It was only at long last, when his features were in

repose, that realisation came to me with something of a shock, and the shock was not so much connected with this young man's dubious means of livelihood as in his immediate surroundings.

Because of the Khan's wealth we frequently found ourselves in questionable company. It follows that any man of means is the butt of the get-rich-quick, and the target for those who desire subscriptions for various causes.

With my Khan the procedure was somewhat different. Because he was under an official cloud, and because it was believed, therefore, that he must be biting on the bit at loggerheads with all accepted authority, he was often requested to subscribe to the purely subversive.

The newspapers, I think, have made it abundantly clear that the subversive element in the East contains many who are of the intelligentsia. A man, such as our lawyer host, might plead with ardour in the courts for the upholding of law and tradition, and obtain his livelihood by such advocacy; yet, at one and the same time he might well have a secret other self which was at war with the world and in sympathy with the new cult of destruction which has come so much to the fore in the past two decades.

This lawyer, a brilliant man, and one well able to command handsome fees was, measured by Western standards, decidedly unbalanced. For many years Kurkura has been the centre of much communal strife between Hindus and Muslims, and this lawyer, a devout lover of his country, had striven for long to secure communal unity. He saw in communal

disruption at once the weakness of his own countrymen and the strength of the British, and he espoused a perfectly laudable cause with enthusiasm and vigour.

Unfortunately it requires more than these two qualities to make the communities see eye to eye, and there were those, the lawyer among them, who sought more spectacular means. At heart these people were patriots, but the very intensity of their patriotism and the negative results attaching to many years of earnest endeavour, had left their mark.

The Khan had been invited to subscribe to a society which, on the surface, had the object of dispersing the fierce communal discord which had long sullied the name of Kurkura, and, while not too sanguine of the results which would attend this body's efforts, he was at least interested. If the society was all that the lawyer claimed it to be, he was prepared to subscribe, and to subscribe handsomely.

This, briefly, was the atmosphere in which I found this young man of the Turkish baths. The talk had gone on interminably, as these conversations will, and the one subject was the intensity of the passion between the two communities and the difficulties attending any *rapprochement* because of the religious intolerance which was the prime cause of the frequent outbreaks of rioting and minor disorder.

I could imagine even a homosexual being vitally interested in the cause of his countrymen, yet when I had identified this young man I admitted to considerable perplexity.

I took greater stock of those at the gathering. Hitherto my attentions had been directed upon the

lawyer, and upon the Khan. I was there to see that the Khan did not part with his money unnecessarily, and as my employer was the principal guest, my interest had been circumscribed.

This, in a degree, was a meeting of principals, and the subject matter was a very serious one. Grouped around us were sundry grey-beards, but on the outer circle were many young men, my youth from the Turkish baths among them.

It was right, I thought, to bring youth in on the side of communal unity, for without youth any movement was preordained to failure; yet I was puzzled.

My senses now more alert, I began to feel a different timbre in the easy run of conversation. Looking around me I sensed that there was something hidden—something sinister. The youths especially had that fanatical gleam in their eyes which does not come of mere enthusiasm.

I waited, and when my opportunity came, turned the conversation from the idealistic plane on which it had hitherto travelled to the much more material.

I asked how this wonderful degree of communal unity was to be achieved. I brushed aside all the previous suggestions that there were to be continued appeals to goodwill, and on behalf of the Khan who, as far as I could see was to be the principal milch cow, asked what machinery was to be evolved to bring the aims of the society home to the masses.

Immediately there was a stir, particularly among the younger men present, and the lawyer lost some of his easy loquaciousness.

With an agility born of long years in the courts he attempted to side-step and to temporise, and it was none other than the lad from the Turkish baths who, now completely bereft of patience, pushed forward and demanded that the lawyer should speak.

He had something of the lisp and the feminine intonation of his kind, but his words did not lack fire, nevertheless.

"Enough," he declaimed. "There has been enough of talk. You have done nothing but talk for years, and to-night is no exception."

He gave the Khan and myself an intolerant glance.

"Why all this talk of money?" he demanded.

He gave a shrill laugh, and his eyes sought those of his fellows on the outer circle.

"Money!" He spat deprecatingly. "Money! We don't need money to die!"

So this was it. There *was* something sinister, and the wily lawyer had been keeping this element in the background.

I saw the lawyer shrug his shoulders, but he met the appraising eye of the Khan quite squarely.

"The impetuousness of youth," he remarked sombrely, but this was not enough, and the Khan demanded explanations. His manner indicated that if the lawyer would not speak, there were those among the youthful audience who would.

Somewhat haltingly the lawyer told.

It seemed that behind the society to which the Khan had been invited to subscribe there was an inner society, and one composed almost entirely of patriotic-spirited youths.

They had banded themselves together in the belief that the time for words was long past. They demanded action, and despairing of securing corporate action, were resolved to sacrifice their own persons in order to call attention to a great social evil.

In brief, we had been invited to a suicides' club.

From the talk which ensued it was quite obvious that these young men had borrowed their principal idea from the suicide clubs of post-war Hungary, but they had twisted the theme so as to give it an appeal to youth, and an appeal advanced far beyond the stage of the macabre to one where suicide spelled the supreme sacrifice for love of one's country.

These young men, in order to focus attention upon the stupidity of continued racial animosities, were determined to stage spectacular deaths much on the lines of the ancient *sati* where widows, for love of their husbands, voluntarily threw themselves upon the funeral pyres of the departed.

There was no doubt that these men were sincere, and it is equally certain that eventually a goodly number of them did commit suicide in accordance with the terms of their oaths. Indeed, so strong a hold did this cult obtain upon the imagination of the youth of Kurkura that well-meaning citizens were constrained to organise anti-suicide clubs.

The real nature of the meeting which we had attended came as a revelation both to the Khan and myself, and I waited to see how my employer would react. He was quite capable of subscribing handsomely merely for the thrill which would come of the knowledge that he was assisting young men to their deaths;

also, he was capable of stalking forth in a rage, and subscribing nothing.

For once he took a middle course.

He begged to be excused, and, when leaving, contemptuously pulled out his wallet and threw a hundred rupee note on to the lawyer's table.

For the Khan this was like an ordinary man tossing a coin to a beggar, and it summed up his feelings for the moment. Yet, that insignificant gift, so nonchalantly given, was to produce unpleasant reactions.

It brought us into close touch with the most secret of the world's secret societies—the fraternity of Bengal Terrorists.

CHAPTER XI

A VENDETTA AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

THE normal resident of Calcutta, if asked to define his city's plague spot, would automatically refer to a street known to all and sundry as "The Rag." It is a place which is not mentioned in polite society, for the houses in this thoroughfare are largely given over to prostitution.

"The Rag" has none of the excessive sordidness of that appalling street in Bombay, in that there is no exhibitionism, and it would be possible to traverse its length without realising that the respectable facades which line its either side hide a traffic which is as old as the hills. "The Rag" is only sordid in that it is a very poor counterpart to that which may be found in so many towns and cities of France. Here one can buy the embraces of avaricious females and liquors of a very indifferent quality. The price for these favours is variable, and is arbitrarily gauged by a stout and peroxided "Madame" who appraises all comers as they cross the portals.

It is the haunt of the soldiers from the Fort, and the sailors from His Majesty's ships, and it contains no more vice than many a similar rendezvous to be found in the majority of the world's ports.

To the uninitiated "The Rag" represents the most

that Calcutta can provide in the way of an underworld, yet it goes almost without saying that there must be other places more vicious. There are!

The Khan became acquainted with a gentleman by the name of Ram Lal. Ram Lal knew all about opium, and its derivative, cocaine. That, in point of fact, was why they became acquainted, because it was during our Bengal sojourn that my employer lapsed yet once again into the habit of drug-taking to a dangerous degree.

Ram Lal was a person of some consequence because he had made much money out of the drug trade, and indeed, had managed a clandestine drug factory for many years with great profit to himself and to the satisfaction of many thousands of secret clients.

At the time when we were so friendly with Ram Lal we did not know this. We only discovered it later. Ram Lal, to the Khan, was nothing more than a congenial talker and a person who could provide unlimited quantities of his favourite drugs.

Also, there was much more in the background of which we were unaware. We did not know, for instance, that some time before Ram Lal had sold his factory to a rival, and that this rival was making so much money out of the business that Ram Lal was fretting. Beneath his genial exterior he was biting on the iron of mortification, for he believed that he had been swindled. At the time he sold his factory the price he received was undoubtedly a good one when based on turnover, and Ram Lal had congratulated himself on making a good bargain. Since then, however, the rival had so built up the business that his

profits were enormous, and Ram Lal, forgetting that his rival's enterprise and business capacity was mainly responsible for this, had convinced himself that he had been badly victimised.

There is something about the Bengal atmosphere that lends itself to the morbidly introspective. For many centuries the Presidency has been malaria-ridden, and this has sapped at the physique of the Bengalis, and has engendered something inherent in the brain fabric which makes for easily induced hysteria and for the most agonising depression.

Ram Lal was no exception; indeed, he was one of the most mercurial men I have ever met. One day he would be up in the clouds, and the next, in a veritable slough of despond, and as he neither drank nor drugged, this could only be attributed to his inheritance.

The matter of this drug factory and its ever increasing prosperity preyed on Ram Lal's mind, and shortly before he swam into our orbit he had taken a very serious step. Racked by the thought of the money his rival was making, he made his way to those who could communicate with the police through secret channels, and he denounced his rival. Not only did he give information about the factory, but he caused information to be conveyed to the Income Tax authorities which showed that he had followed his rival's activities with a remarkable degree of accuracy.

The result was that not only was the factory raided, the rival arrested and a temporary end put to the illicit manufacture of drugs, but the unfortunate man was faced with a bill of astronomical proportions from

the Income Tax authorities coupled with threats of both civil and criminal proceedings for non-payment and evasion.

Not unnaturally, the rival was sore, but as I have indicated, all this was unknown to us.

What was unknown to Ram Lal was that this enemy had secured bail! had it been otherwise I am certain that he would not have been so hearty and carefree as we chatted together so amiably on his verandah.

Neither, for that matter, should we, for Ram Lal's business adversary had sworn vengeance for the mud thrown in his face, and was out to make trouble.

Well I remember that evening. It was very hot and sticky as only Calcutta can be, and the verandah, though pleasant enough in itself was one built for the day. It was not so sited that it caught the evening breezes. Consequently, all the chicks had been raised, small oscillating fans whirled on small occasional tables, and an abundance of ice drinks helped in producing an illusion of coolness.

The verandah was brilliantly lighted, and its very brilliance made darker the shadows of the outer compound.

As I have indicated, we were chatting easily, and the Khan was working pleasurably up to that moment when he would retire within for his shot of cocaine when there came a sudden interruption from the shadows.

At first I could not distinguish the words, and I lazily assumed that it was some servant of Ram Lal's engaged in despatching a snake or having some altercation with a fellow servant.

Not so Ram Lal, however. I saw him stiffen in his chair, and there was a distinct drop to his lower jaw. Beads of perspiration appeared on his forehead, and I heard him murmur the name, "Daulat Baksh."

Again there was a shout from the shadows, and as far as I could judge, it came from behind a pipal tree.

The tone was raucous and mocking, and I saw our host squirm.

I sensed the tenseness of the atmosphere, and subconsciously I realised that there was much more behind this somewhat bizarre scene than met the eye. At that moment I had no knowledge either of Ram Lal's factory, or of his double-crossing.

"O, Ram Lal! "

The man in the shadows addressed our host directly, and personally.

Ram Lal opened his mouth to speak, but no words came, and the unseen watcher, observing his obvious distress, laughed evilly.

"So, you know me, Ram Lal? "

The miserable man at our side made a feeble gesture.

"So, you would sell me to the police? "

Again came that mocking laugh.

There was movement in the shadows, and a man advanced toward the area of light shed by the verandah lamps. Just short of the illuminated patch he halted, and it was just possible to see that he carried something in his hand. I, for one, began to feel uncomfortable, because I had no doubt that that something was a pistol.

"Daulat Baksh has come to complete his business with Ram Lal! "

It was now patent that the man was addressing the Khan and myself. We gazed in his direction with some amazement, but neither of us spoke.

"Ram Lal's guests are my guests," the voice went on. "I must ask you to remain seated."

The man had a gun, and we were not disposed to argue with him, even had we wished to rise.

At our side Ram Lal gave a little moan; then a chick covering the doorway to one of the inner rooms was thrust aside, and another figure stalked on to the scene. It was Ram Lal's son, a young man aged about twenty.

The sudden appearance of the youth galvanised our host into activity.

"Go back—go back," he implored, and there was urgency and apprehension in his tone.

He sought to rise to give greater emphasis to his words, but even as he moved three shots rang out in quick succession.

I heard him gasp; I saw him stiffen; then I saw his eyes open wildly to give place to a fleeting expression of utter bewilderment. Then he sagged forward upon himself, and the area around his chair was a welter of blood.

In that instant of stillness which followed the shattering roar of the pistol, the voice again came from the semi-darkness.

"Daulat Baksh always pays," it said, and the figure had gone.

The Khan and I, after the first second or so of paralysis during which we gazed stupidly at Ram Lal's twitching body, turned quickly upon each other. The

movement was spontaneous as if we had been released from some binding spell; we gazed into each other's eyes, and we both levelled an unspoken query.

In short, it meant: What is going to happen to *us*?

It was the Khan who answered the riddle. With a jerk of his hand he indicated the street beyond. Without so much as a word we stole away to lose ourselves in the mob which quickly began to gather around Ram Lal's house.

We waited anxiously for repercussions, but there was none such as we imagined. We hardly dared to go forth from our hotel, but there came no visit from the police.

Instead, we read of the affair in the newspapers as did the other residents of Calcutta. We learned that one Daulat Baksh had been arrested on suspicion, and that an identification parade was to be held.

In the next day's papers we read that the parade had been held and had proved abortive. Ram Lal's son had been there, but he had failed to pick out his father's murderer. Whatever the shortcomings of the deceased Ram Lal, his son observed the law of the underworld and refused to tell.

Daulat Baksh was released; he was still on bail on a lesser charge, and the police, though tolerably certain that they were dealing with a murderer believed that they could pick up their man when they had secured the necessary evidence.

Daulat Baksh went direct from the court to his home. As he alighted from the taxi which he had hired a slim, youthful figure appeared from behind a bush. It was Ram Lal's son, and he had a knife in

his hand. We know little of the details of that encounter—only the fact that Daulat Baksh died, and a son's honour was avenged.

That night, the son died—wiped out in his sleep by relatives of the dead Daulat. So the cycle was completed.

The feud made a furore in the vernacular press at the time, but the Khan and I said and did nothing. We deemed it more expedient to remain quietly on the defensive in the knowledge that Fate was taking a hand in this grim drama and that anything we might say to the police could hardly assist the cause of justice and merely swing the unpleasant rays of an official searchlight in our own direction.

No one could have been more circumspect than the Khan during these days. His life was impeccable, and in the hotel he was accepted as a rich visitor with no vices and very few interests. Yet, there were those who watched and who knew differently, and—they were not connected with the police.

I well remember the exclamation of annoyance to which the Khan gave expression as he pulled an ordinary playing card from his jacket pocket.

"The third!" he growled.

He turned to me angrily.

"Are you playing one of your damn-fool games?"

I could only stare stupidly, first at the card; then at the Khan.

"The third," he said again, and he turned the card face upwards.

I saw that it was the ace of clubs.

"What does it mean?" I hazarded.

"How the devil do I know?" responded my employer, thoroughly irate.

"I found the first one on my dressing-table with my cigarette case and other trifles," he went on a little more graciously. "I wondered how the devil it had got there, and I yelled for my servant. He assured me that he had found it in my pocket with my other things, and that he had laid it out on the dressing-table, not caring to throw it away without permission. I told him to remove it, and thought no more of the incident.

"Yesterday morning it was still on my dressing-table, or so I thought, and I damned my servant good and hard, and demanded to know why he hadn't thrown the thing away as I had instructed. He told me that he had, and that the card on the dressing-table was yet another. He had taken it from my jacket pocket.

"That one made me think. I realised that there was no accident, and that someone was playing the fool. That is why I felt in my pocket just now. I thought perhaps I would find another, and sure enough, there it is."

The Khan gave the piece of pasteboard a distasteful look. We were sitting in the hotel lounge, and the time was yet before noon. We had spoken to no one, and we had not mingled with the other guests. Yet someone, in the period between descending from our apartments and then, had surreptitiously slipped a third card into the Khan's pocket.

My employer growled, and said that he was going out for air. He ordered a taxi, and away we went.

The Khan sat deeply into his corner, wrestling with

his thoughts. I too remained silent, and watched the traffic.

I noticed that our driver experienced considerable difficulty in passing a touring car just ahead of us. Either the driver of the tourer was inexperienced or he had a quarrelsome nature, for every time our man attempted to pass, the tourer swung out and blocked his passage. I could hear our driver swearing, and I began to take a little more notice.

Again our driver made to take advantage of a channel in the traffic; again the tourer pulled out and impeded his progress.

I drew the attention of the Khan to this strange procedure, and when a further opportunity for passing presented itself, he sat well forward, his face alight with interest.

"*Chello*," he roared to the driver, but at the last moment the man was baulked and again we had to fall behind.

The Khan was not the person to take this kind of treatment kindly, and he yelled imprecations at the tourer, and shook his fist.

The passenger in the back seat of the tourer became aware of his presence, and we saw him smile. We saw him raise his hand to disclose in its palm a playing card. Although the distance between us was considerable there was no doubt in our minds that it was the ace of clubs.

The Khan sat back in his seat, nonplussed. He puzzled over the incident for a moment, then quietly gave directions to our taxi-driver.

"Follow that car in front," he ordered, and our man,

probably well content with the thought that he might eventually try conclusions with a driver whose manners and driving he deplored, stolidly proceeded to do so.

It was a long drive, and it took us well outside Calcutta.

We kept position some thirty or forty yards behind the tourer, but its back-seat occupant gave no further sign that he acknowledged our presence.

"What do you make of this stupid business?" the Khan demanded of me, but I knew as much about the matter as the Khan did.

"I suppose we shall find ourselves in another scrape before long," I ventured.

"M-m. Trouble seems to go out of its way to track us down," my employer agreed equibly. The frown which he had worn on his forehead disappeared with the thought, and it was obvious that he was now enjoying the situation.

My cogitations were brought to an end when the tourer swung into the ill-kept drive of what had once been a palatial bungalow. Our driver turned and glanced at the Khan, and the Khan nodded. We followed the tourer up the drive, and pulled up close behind it.

Its passenger alighted, and he came towards us and greeted us easily.

"I thought I was never going to attract your attention," he said somewhat surprisingly, and the Khan, man of the world that he was, merely smiled.

With a courteous gesture the man indicated that we should precede him up the steps to the bungalow's

verandah. We obeyed, and shortly found ourselves in a lounge, plainly, but comfortably furnished.

Our host—I call him that for want of a better name—bade us be seated, and he called for refreshments.

“I have been trying to get into touch with you for several days,” he said when these had been put in front of us, and the servant had discreetly withdrawn.

“The cards?” The Khan shot the question interrogatively, and our host smiled, and nodded.

“Yes, I thought that you would have acted on the sign more quickly, but—one has to be circumspect!” Again he smiled, and with the air of a conspirator.

“Well, now we have come, what do you want of us?” The Khan, notwithstanding his Eastern origin, could be as abrupt as a Westerner when he chose.

The other waved his hands. The gesture was almost deprecating, and this time the smile was a giggle. Almost was he embarrassed.

He coughed, and hesitated while the Khan waited implacably for an answer. Then:

“The Cause! We are somewhat short of money, and knowing of your interest, there are those who deputed me to ask for a subscription.”

“A subscription!” The Khan grunted.

Our host rubbed his hands and squirmed in his chair; but he retained his smile.

“The work must go on, and though we do not lack recruits, money is frequently a difficulty.”

“The work—what work?” The Khan, who could give with both hands when the mood was upon him, had a rooted dislike to being bearded, and he believed

that he was being bearded now. His tone was gruff, and his manner exceedingly abrupt.

The other, if he noticed the Khan's coldness, affected not to notice, for he descended to gentle raillery.

"The work! Of course, we never speak about it openly, but here—here we are quite safe." His manner indicated that we were fully in his confidence.

The Khan looked hard at the speaker. "I am afraid," he said bitingly, "that you must be a little more explicit before I open my cheque book."

"Of course—of course." The man positively purred. "You have every reason to suspect—in the Cause we are taught to suspect, but I know you for one of us, and presently I will show you that which will convince you that I am no charlatan."

"You know me as one of the Cause?" The Khan could hardly keep the astonishment from his tone.

"Of course. Did you not give a subscription to the young men of Kurkura. We soon learned of that. And, in a certain matter here in Calcutta—something to which you were an actual eye-witness, you remained quiet. You neither sought the protection of the police; nor did you inform!"

Matters were becoming a little clearer, but not much.

"This 'Cause,'" countered the Khan. "Cannot you tell us a little more?"

For answer, the other rose.

"Come," he said smilingly. "I will not tell you. I will *show* you."

When we emerged from the bungalow we found that our taxi had gone. "I took the liberty of paying

the man and dismissing him," explained our host as he ushered us into his tourer.

We were driven back to the main street of Calcutta, and there alighted, the man explaining that a car was a somewhat conspicuous object, and that secrecy was the watchword. He led us through a number of tortuous alleys, and eventually to a house which would have appeared much less gloomy had it had the attentions of a builder in the last forty or fifty years.

In a darkened room we found some twenty to twenty-five young men assembled. They paid little or no attention to our entry, their gaze being directed upon one leonine individual who was frothing forth tense, fanatical sentences which were at once gripping and repulsive.

He was urging his hearers to "throw themselves into the vortex of strife." That phrase recurred again and again, and the air vibrated with this man's hypnotic emotionalism. I felt myself compelled to listen to his outrageous doctrines, all devised to deliver India from "the shackles of a Satanic Imperialism." That was another oft-repeated phrase.

He painted the British as tyrants and as blood-suckers at the throats of India's depressed. He spoke of the cynicism with which the dominant race reacted to every demand for constitutional reform.

He drew an analogy with Ireland, and he told his listeners something of which they were already very well aware. He praised and lauded the manner in which the Irish had secured their independence and had forced the hated British into the sea.

He deified the cult of sudden death and the revolver.

He raised the bomb to the plane of abject adoration, and the dagger he painted as a divine instrument to cut the knots which bound India to the dominance of an alien race.

The young men in that darkened room literally ate of his words. They moaned and groaned with the ecstacy of a burning patriotism, and at intervals they chanted.

“O Freedom,” they intoned. “O Freedom; O Liberty; we give ourselves unto Thee.”

These youths, unbalanced by the force of their emotion, had taken the irrevocable Terrorist vows. All that was required was for one to come forward for work which was upon hand. Evidently this had been detailed before our arrival. All that I was able to gather from the fanatical outpourings was that the killing—it could be nothing else—was timed for the following week. The venue was to be Calcutta’s race-course.

The atmosphere in the room was stifling. There was a smell of hot, perspiring bodies, and the unclean odours which clung to the depressing house.

The harangue of the fiery-tongued speaker was fantastic in its vitriolic vehemence, and the gapings and the moaning of the young men around us overpowering in their fatuousness.

Yet, as I have said, there was a tenseness. One realised the moment one set foot in this dubious apartment, that here was a terrible sincerity. The speaker believed all that he said. The fire and the power which he exuded came from deep within him; and his youthful listeners too believed in every word he uttered.

As the hot sentences fell from his lips a Bengali boy, even more youthful than the rest, forced his way forward through the throng. I had been watching him, and I knew by the spasmodic working of his features that he would be the one to claim the speaker's attention and dedicate himself to the bloody work at hand.

As soon as the youth's movement was discerned by the rest they pressed round him.

"Banda Matram," they chanted.

"Brave man!" shouted one inconsequentially in stilted English.

The speaker himself addressed the unfortunate boy—he was little more—as the "Saviour of India." The others, still clustering around, and not a little relieved to my thinking that they should have escaped "selection," heaped banal blandishments on one shortly to be despatched upon a fell errand.

The youth himself, his lips twitching with the intensity of his emotion, lifted up his hands in supplication.

Before him, held in the hands of the spell-binding speaker who now appeared more like an arch priest conducting holy rites at an altar, was a revolver.

Slowly it was lowered towards him, and the boy clutched it in convulsive hands and conveyed it to his lips, and kissed it.

"Banda Matram," shouted the onlookers.

"Kali, give me strength," sobbed the young anarchist in a strangled whisper.

Our temporarily forgotten host nudged the Khan on the arm.

"Do you believe now?" he asked smilingly. Apparently the gripping scene which we had seen had had no effect upon him. He could still produce that oily smile, and there was not the slightest trace of emotion or tremor in his tones.

I felt sick.

We had just seen an unbalanced boy dedicate himself to a dreadful task, and one which, if carried through to its logical conclusion, would mean the spilling of blood and perhaps death or lifelong imprisonment for himself.

And this man could still smile, and what is more, still expect a contribution to assist the dreadful crusade, the veil over which had been so surprisingly lifted.

I heard the Khan grunt, and I knew what he was feeling. My principal fear was that he would turn upon this man and blast him to eternity. One word out of place in that house would have spelled death, for its habitués could not afford to take chances.

Fortunately, the Khan was content merely to grunt, and he continued to grunt as we groped our way to the cleaner air of the bazaar beyond.

Our host guided us to a small café, and he eyed the Khan appraisingly. He had no need to speak. His manner said plainly enough: You have seen what you have seen, and all that is required is the flourish of a cheque book.

I saw the Khan hesitate. I expected him to give vent to his long bottled feelings, and to stalk away. But, no. Surprisingly enough, his hand went to his pocket, and his cheque book was produced.

"How much?" he asked succinctly.

The other merely grinned, and rubbed his hands.

"Would ten thousand rupees suffice?"

"It would be princely!"

The man was almost overcome with emotion. I was so startled that I could hardly repress a gasp.

"Ten thousand rupees," murmured the Khan, writing. "I will make it open, and—yes—it had better be 'To self.'"

Our host smiled knowingly, and nodded his head in pleased acquiescence.

"But——" The Khan furrowed his forehead in some perplexity. He looked up at our host, who viewed his hesitation with some alarm.

"It is a large amount for an open cheque." The Khan tapped the table with his fountain pen while he pondered the problem.

"It will be necessary for me to write to the bank agent," he went on, "and explain that the cheque has been issued. Because of that I had better date it two days hence—I think that will meet the occasion." And, he wrote.

He passed the slip of paper to the outstretched hand of the other, and rose.

Amidst the man's continued praising of the Khan's princely generosity, we made good our escape.

When we eventually found a taxi, and were on our way to the hotel, I turned to the Khan. Again it was unnecessary to speak.

The Khan grinned.

"Will you write that note?" I asked.

"Why not?" My employer could be very difficult at times.

“ Well—you are hardly one to subscribe to assassination! ”

“ I’m not! But, I fully intend to write that note, and moreover, take special pains to see that it is safely delivered.”

I gulped, and the Khan went on:

“ The note can be written to-morrow, yet actually we have two days. Look up the boats, and we’ll clear out of this. I have had enough of Calcutta! ”

“ What do you intend to do? There is every need to be cautious . . . ”

Again the Khan laughed.

“ I intend to be cautious; that is why I am asking you to look up the boats. When we get back to the hotel we will start packing in the hope that we can get out to-morrow.”

“ But, the note,” I hazarded.

“ Yes, the note! That will be written. It will not be exactly the kind of note our friend will expect, but it will be written. And—I shall see to it that we have a special messenger to convey it, and one provided by the police! ”

I understood.

I realised that the matter of the boat was one of urgency.

CHAPTER XXII

THE ART OF LOVE

It was not to be. As on another occasion when our activities were brought to the attention of the police, so was authority reluctant to bid us too speedy a farewell.

Soon after the Khan had telephoned his amazing information to police headquarters, the telephone bell rang again, and it was authority suggesting lunch at Calcutta's principal restaurant.

We went, and there we met two suave Englishmen. Both were of the C.I.D., and I, for one, would never have suspected it. The principal was a tall, broad-shouldered giant with what I can best term a very ordinary accent. I do not mean to infer from that that it was coarse; it was not, but it savoured neither of the so-called intonation of Oxford, or the clipped, pedantic mannerisms of Cambridge. Yet I was to learn that this man was a Fellow of All Souls, and to judge by his writings alone, something of a *savant*.

The other was thin, and he had a bald head. He spoke quietly, and his manner was in strange contrast to the robustness of the other. He was almost gentle and retiring, yet this was one of the most famous linguists of the day. Not only was he proficient in the majority of the main languages of the East, but as I

had occasion to learn, he was quite at home with the *patois* of the Austrian hinterland. One of the men scooped up in the police net was an Austrian, and it was he who was one of the principal go-betweens in the traffic of cheap Continental revolvers.

In vain the Khan pointed out to these C.I.D. men that he had told all that he knew. They were polite, but adamant. The Khan, they insisted, would be furthering the cause of justice by remaining in Calcutta for a period.

Had we not, they reminded us, come face to face with many of those in the inner ring of the Terrorist movement?

Moreover, by a cycle of mischance, were we not *persona grata* with some of the movement's principals?

The C.I.D. men assured us that the action which they would take would effectively shroud us from all suspicion of being informers, and quite brightly, and almost nonchalantly, it was suggested to us that we should continue in our rôle of sympathisers, and thus allow other Terrorists to make contact.

The Khan gasped when this very cool proposal was made, and he turned the suggestion down flatly, and with finality.

Here, I think he was right. He had already given the authorities invaluable information, and they asked a great deal when they suggested that we should continue a highly dangerous association.

The Bengal Terrorists, who were then taking a heavy toll of human life, were a people in themselves, and it was quite impossible to compute the number subscribing to the movement because the organisation was all

underground. All that was known was that a large percentage of disappointed University students were linked up with the insidious work, and that the organisers had a large semi-intellectual force upon which to draw for their recruits.

The uninitiated might suppose that the Terrorists would have turned to those well versed in the art of murder for their instruments of death. There were, and are, in Bengal, many descendants of the famous Thugs, thousands who recall with pride that their fathers were red-handed Hooghli pirates, and more thousands classed as criminal tribesmen—an amazing flotsam and jetsam always ready to turn to knavery of any description.

The principals behind the Terrorist organisation knew better than to do this. Many had served a dreadful apprenticeship in Chicago and in Russia, and they returned to India with two facts well impressed upon their minds. One was that men of criminal antecedents were necessarily well-known to the police. The other, that to employ such men for their purposes would be to place Terrorism on the lowly plane of mob murder.

These astute men required something more—something that would stir the imagination of the youth of Bengal. So, they directed their appeal to the young men (and women) whose scholastic attainments just fell short of the standard required to secure public appointments. In other words, they prostituted disappointment, and the bitterness which comes of unemployment. All the misguided youngsters who sold their souls to the cult of death would have been stalwart

supporters of the State had they secured a few more marks on their examination papers.

This was the type of youth we had seen in that murky room in Calcutta. All had had it impressed upon them that they had a mission. I imagine that in almost every case the family patrimony had been exhausted in providing educational facilities which were to raise the family status to the hierarchy of officialdom; and these lads had felt the parental displeasure when they failed to satisfy the examiners, and perhaps even the pangs of hunger.

We learned how these stripling assassins came to serve their long initiation. Passing around a great city searching for employment which consistently evaded them, they were marked down by those who realised that a gnawing at the vitals of a concave stomach is the surest foundation upon which to build that ecstatic conception of a Divinely directed duty which sends haggard young men forth armed with lethal weapons and a mad determination to kill.

When lounging forlornly around the bazaars someone would whisper. There would follow an introduction to some den where the initiate was introduced to the brain-storm narcotics which the East can produce with a soul-destroying facility. A solid meal was the last thing these unfortunates were offered.

At the right moment, and when the ground had been well prepared, there came the ceremony of initiation, and the frightful ceremonial attaching to the taking of the oath—a weird, mystic rite accompanied by the sacrifice of a fowl, the jingling of bells, the smoking of incense, and blood-curdling incantations.

Before the opening in the traffic of arms these young men were provided with clumsy, ill-made percussion bombs which frequently failed to explode on impact. They resembled those glass bulbs which were attached to submarine nets during the War. These glass containers—several were later displayed before us by the C.I.D.—were blown in the bazaars, filled with gunpowder and odd pieces of metal, and provided with a detonator.

During the time that we were in Bengal the revolver was the principal weapon, and those who know the difficulties of hitting a target with these short-barrelled monstrosities will have to agree that many of these young Terrorists were good marksmen.

Only one thing did the Khan agree to do for the C.I.D. He flatly refused openly to court the acquaintanceship of those avowedly in the movement, but he consented, during the rest of our time in Calcutta, to take an interest in a certain district preponderantly Hindu.

The Khan did so unwillingly because, as he pointed out, the presence of two prying Muslims in that quarter might be open to serious question.

The Fellow of All Souls merely smiled gently when he suggested that the Khan's presence there might not be misunderstood, principally because his reputation in respect to the bizarre was not entirely unknown!

Also, the Khan made one stipulation which the dreamy-eyed linguist immediately accepted. He insisted that his cheque for ten thousand rupees, when recovered by the police in the raid which they were planning, should be cashed, and the proceeds directed,

under official or semi-official guidance, to the rehabilitation of those of the young Terrorists who might show signs of profiting from properly controlled instruction.

I am pleased to think that more than one boy was saved from a lifetime in jail and brought to a sense of his civic responsibilities by the generosity of the Khan.

Our duty in the Hindu quarter indicated by the C.I.D. was to wait to be accosted. There was, we were assured, no need to take other than a cursory interest in the peculiar characteristics of the neighbourhood. However, the C.I.D. had reason to believe that a well-known Terrorist had a hide-out in the vicinity and might be tempted to make overtures to the Khan. The fact that he did not, either because he considered the Khan suspect or had found another warren for his carcase, is by the way.

The district to which we transferred our attentions was one of temples. Bells continually clanged, sacrificial goats wandered without let or hindrance all over the dirty thoroughfares, and the place was eternally thronged by the devout of both sexes.

The temples were of the type that accentuated the sex instinct. They were visited by women who believed themselves sterile and were anxious to produce children for their husbands, and by men who were impotent, or believed themselves to be so.

Around the temples there had grown up a terrific trade in semi-magical "remedies," all calculated to assist the ministrations of the priests. All the recipes for the barren and the impotent detailed in the

Kamasatra were to be found there in abundance, with hundreds of others evolved since that love treatise was written.

In the little hovels in which these love merchants plied their ghastly trade all was open for the passer-by to see. Little was hidden, and nothing veiled.

Squatting in the semi-darkness of the interior we saw these pseudo-chemists working away with crude pestle and mortar, and the ingredients which went into those love potions were extraordinary, and frequently revolting.

There were those who provided potions which were guaranteed to be purely vegetable in make-up, and they were. They were composed, as far as I could judge by the components which went into the mortars, of cloves, pepper, nutmeg and herbs in bewildering profusion. I cannot speak of the herbs because I was unable to identify them, but the properties of nutmeg and pepper especially, are well-known throughout the East.

For the most part, women were the purchasers of these vegetable compounds, but the women were not averse to sampling something of a stronger brew should mere herb extract fail to find them with child. Indeed, it was obvious to all who spent any time in that quarter, that the women would go to almost any lengths to escape from the taunt of being barren.

There was one hovel which was visited by an amazing assortment of women, and the owner did a stupendous trade and sold of his wares almost as soon as he could prepare them.

I could not but fail to notice that there was some

women who bought openly from the street, and others who entered the hovel and did their business in the semi-secrecy of the shadows.

I remarked upon this strange difference in feminine mentality to the Khan, and he smiled.

The next time we passed the hovel he nodded, and pointed out to me that the women who entered invariably conducted their transactions in the furthest recesses of the shop and with their backs toward the street.

"Because they do not want their faces to be seen?" "I suggested.

"Precisely, but not for the reason you have in mind."

I often wondered where the Khan derived his almost encyclopædic knowledge.

"Those women," he went on, "are not buying—they are selling!"

"Selling?" I failed to see what would find a price in that squalid emporium of filth.

"Yes, selling. Each month they go along to that shop and for a few pice sell their menstrual blood!"

I paled, and caught at my stomach which revolted at the thought.

"And . . . ?"

"Yes, that is the muck that goes into that man's nostrums, and sterile women nearly fight for his philtres. He is reputed to be incredibly rich, and women come great distances to buy of him, so great is his reputation."

I felt sick, and my face must have showed it, for the Khan laughed.

"That's not all," he went on. "These women—fastidious, dainty creatures in our eyes—can descend to

the most alarming pranks. Come—we'll go into the next street, and we'll see something."

"One thing has to be said for these women," the Khan proceeded. "They do all these horrible things only that they might save their husband's souls by providing him with an heir. And one has to agree that they are not afraid of absorbing the most terrifying mixtures."

I winced.

The Khan caught my expression and chuckled.

"No," said the Khan, "we will now see something of the other side of the picture." We had reached the next street, and he produced a five-rupee note and handed it to an urchin.

Without a blink the child dashed down an alley and led us into a house. We climbed some murky stairs and came upon a diminutive verandah, well screened, and looking down upon a court.

There, a truly amazing sight met my eyes.

There were perhaps thirty women present there, and all were upon their knees with their heads touching the ground. For a moment I thought that I was gazing down upon some temple compound where the women were engaged in prayer, but—only for the briefest moment.

Every woman there had bared her body, and each was kneading bread with her posterior.

An old woman of elephantine proportions was the mistress of the ceremonies. She went round among the women with a tray offering bread to all who required it. The bread had been specially blessed by a priest.

I remained dumb for a while, hardly daring to believe my eyes.

I turned to the Khan.

"And I suppose that they will eat that filth, believing that they will soon be with child?"

The Khan shook his head, and grinned.

"That is not for the women," he explained. "There you see delicate morsels being prepared for erring husbands!"

"What," I gasped, "do the women intend to murder them?"

"Hardly that. The ladies are preparing love bread. They believe that it has amazing effects upon a husband whose love has grown cold!"

"I can well believe it," I muttered as I held on to my heaving stomach. I had seen enough, and said so.

Whether the recipients of this love bread would have revolted had they been aware of the nature of its preparation, I know not, for with my own eyes I saw men eating of the most revolting concoctions.

There were booths which displayed dishes prepared from bullock's horns; another—for men of considerable means only—had on display cakes which contained sinews of tigers; one—more expensive still—disposed of brown objects said to contain the claws of male bears from Kashmir.

Men who partook of these revolting ingredients really and readily believed that they were restoring vigour and life to their loins. The tragedy underlying this belief lay in that fact that although impotent, men would thereafter consider their wives the defaulting partner, and would perhaps dispose of them and take

another woman more calculated to provide the heir without whose presence at death no true Hindu can find Paradise.

There were other booths patronised by both sexes. These sold preparations of musk—also brought from Kashmir—and others which sold amber.

Musk is expensive, yet there were always ready purchasers. On the other hand, those who placed their faith in the properties of amber were not so many. Amber, I have noticed, is mainly used as an aphrodisiac in Egypt, and in the Cairene bazaars one can buy a variety of articles impregnated with amber. Cigarettes especially are made up in this manner, and incidentally, a large trade is done in them with London and Paris. There was one dealer in Cairo who displayed for my delectation a whole pile of orders, some of them written by members of the British aristocracy. What the writers of these notes would have felt had they known that their letters were being freely exhibited as testimonials for this dealer's cigarettes I fail to imagine!

CHAPTER XIII

LOVE AND COMMERCE

THERE are three principal unlicensed brothels in Shanghai, and the "fees" are relatively high. In none of them are to be found women who carry with them any of the outward signs of the malignant tragedies of their Fatherland. Most of them are Russian, and it has become the fashion to paint all the thousands of Russian prostitutes to be found in China as victims of a cruel adversity. That there are thousands of Russian women who have embraced, or been forced into, prostitution in China because of the dictates of politics and economic pressure, is unfortunately a truism, but the women I saw in these three institutions in Shanghai had become inmates solely because the life held out greater attractions to them than the more mundane one of work.

These brothels maintain a high degree of cleanliness and of comfort in that they appeal to the bachelor of the foreign community. He is a young man with a certain amount of money and with no small degree of refinement. To induce him to sample of the wares offered by these emporiums of vice attention has to be paid to atmosphere and background. If the women are not remarkable for their virtuosity, they must at

least be pleasing and companionable, and all this presupposes a high standard of comfort for the women themselves, and conditions sufficiently attractive to maintain a continued sequence of recruits, for curiously enough, many of these women eventually marry, and to Chinamen of wealth.

The women of these brothels have little to mark them from the general rut. Their counterpart is to be found in hundreds of other such establishments in many parts of the world. For the sake of continuity these establishments have to be tolerably well conducted; the women must conform to a certain standard, and the very fees which are demanded make for a certain exclusiveness and as a safeguard, though not a very sure one, against the spread of disease.

Those who expect to see something of the night haunts of Shanghai do not necessarily visit any of these brothels, for any experience to be gained there is hedged in by commercialism and by the strict desire of inmates and visitors to escape publicity and trouble.

There are other ways of seeing something of the seamier side of Shanghai, but before embarking upon this topic I should like briefly to refer to the more unfortunate type of Russian prostitute, and to give the story of one as it was related to me.

Madame — told me little of her life in Russia except to hint that her husband had been one of the principal supporters of Trotsky, and therefore, under the Stalin regime, one who was the object of an ever-growing suspicion.

Madame — was one of the later-day refugees, and not one of the so-called White Russians, who had to

flee from Russia into China during the time of the Bolshevik revolution.

She was a refugee because the wave of Stalin "purges" came slowly, yet inevitably in the direction of her husband, and the time came when, if he was not to be arrested among the next batch to be accused of sabotage, flight was the only alternative.

What made flight so hazardous was that it could only be attempted in winter-time when the frozen rivers of Siberia no longer provided an insurmountable barrier.

The actual escape across the steppes was made in a sleigh. Because of the speed which had to be maintained, little in the way of valuables could be transported, most of the "load" being necessarily given over to provisions.

A few miles short of the Chinese border, and just when they were in imminent danger of being apprehended by the always vigilant Russian frontier guards, they fell in with a party of Chinese guides, who apparently make a lucrative living in guiding refugees across little-known tracks.

The price to be paid to these guides was a heavy one, but there was no alternative. Although most woefully short of money, these men had to be paid; otherwise detection by the frontier guards was a foregone conclusion.

Madame ——— crossed the border in this fashion opposite the region of Blagoveschtsensk, and the distance which lay ahead of her and her husband was still immense, and one calling for considerable capital and an infinite variety of resource.

Staying at small Chinese inns *en route* they were compelled to sell first their small stock of valuables, and finally even their horse—their sleigh had been abandoned long since. They went on in considerable fear as they were woefully ignorant of the country and its conditions, and they were fair game for all those who wished to extort.

Prices of commodities changed with alarming frequency in the various districts through which they passed, and it was never safe to make mental calculations of the bill that would be presented when the time came to vacate an inn. Thus, the inevitable happened, and the time came when, thoroughly deceived and exploited over many days of travel, they found themselves without the wherewithal to meet the demands of a particularly rapacious Chinese inn-keeper.

There ensued a particularly unpleasant interview with mine host, who made not the slightest secret of the fact that he required payment in cash, or the equivalent in kind. He glanced meaningly at the baggage still in the possession of Madame —— and her husband, not knowing that the bags were empty of anything negotiable, and that he had been entertaining a couple of absolute paupers.

For a time Madame —— and her husband retired to their miserable room to discuss the situation. Flight was impossible because the village was remote, they had to depend upon local guides for their direction, and they had no means of transport other than that provided by their own feet.

They were in a dilemma, and they were presented with a problem to which they could find no answer.

However, the Chinese innkeeper found one. He suggested that Madame should remain in his inn as a form of hostage against payment, that the husband should continue on his way and later remit that which was owed. Then, and then only, his wife would be free to leave.

It was a preposterous suggestion, but it is one which has been made in many thousands of cases, and has had to be accepted. Beggars never have been allowed to be choosers.

Madame — remained, and her husband departed. The condition of China being what it was it is not surprising that she never heard from him again.

She remained in the inn, ostensibly as a guest, for more than a month. Then the innkeeper made his presence felt. He explained that were he dealing with a Chinese woman, the circumstances would warrant him setting her to work, taking her to his bed if he so desired, or passing her off to others for a consideration.

Gravely, he intimated that although a Russian, she could not continue to live as a non-paying guest for ever, and that in reality there was but one alternative.

Bitterly, Madame — realised it, and she was forced to submit. She became both a servant and a concubine.

Later, when the Chinaman had tired of her, he passed her on, and eventually she succeeded in making her way to Shanghai where, by a stroke of what she regarded as amazingly good fortune she found a home in one of the principal brothels. She confessed that during her journey from Russia to Shanghai she had been forced to accommodate more than one hundred

and sixty Chinamen. Her body was her sole passport, and she had to offer it to whoever would pay.

While she was the chattel of the innkeeper and those who came after him, hard work was also demanded of her, but when she made her escape, and journeyed from village to village, she was spared this. Yet, to lie with a Chinaman was the only method of securing shelter and food, and the wherewithal with which to continue a nightmare journey.

Curiously enough Madame — displayed no signs of the mental and physical stress which had been hers. Her expression was serene; her face was unlined, and in her own way she appeared to be moderately happy.

I have already indicated, however, that it is not to the Shanghai brothels that the ordinary seeker after distraction looks for his pleasure. The brothels I have mentioned are very ordinary, and by the very nature of their being cannot afford to stray off the very rigid line of conduct which convention (or the lack of it) lays down for such establishments.

During the past two decades the Russian *émigrée* has found a new field for her endeavours in the majority of the principal commercial centres of China, or anywhere, indeed, where there is a considerable Anglo-American colony.

These women have taken to the profession of dancing partners, and this may be regarded as a pseudonym for almost anything.

There must be many hundreds of these Russian dancing partners in Shanghai alone, and they differ as chalk does from cheese. They only have one point in common and that is their outward respectability—

often carried to an extreme and almost absurd degree—and their readiness always to fall in with the inevitable and eventual suggestion.

There are elegant dancing establishments in Shanghai where girls may be hired on the ticket system and which, outwardly at least, are so refined and respectable that the European and American society men who visit them may feel no qualms at introducing their own women-folk. They do so in the knowledge that the dancing partners are the soul of discretion, and would no more think of resorting to blackmail than of remaining virtuous.

The majority of these girls earn good money as dancing partners, the best of them aggregating perhaps four hundred dollars a month. Almost without exception, however, their other emoluments are considerably in excess of this. Many of these dancing partners retire after a few years with sufficient money to maintain themselves for the rest of their lives, and not a few of them marry.

Perhaps because of the fact that their prostitution is hidden by a veil—even though it is a transparent one—they enter into their extra duties with much more eagerness and zest than do the women condemned to the brothels. They are intelligent and ready talkers; they are exceedingly companionable, and though they would deem the evening ill spent if it did not lead to a double bedroom, matters of sex are never allowed to intrude.

In a manner they are somewhat akin to the dancing girls of India in that they are ready, and always there, to provide amusement. They differ in that they

have few of the vices of the nautch girl. Indeed, if prostitution can be respectable, these women have made it so.

Certainly, they feel no sense of shame in consorting so freely with the guests at these dancing establishments and entering into arrangements for subsequent entertainment which embraces more than dancing. They know themselves for what they are, and they make the best of a life which has so many elements of tragedy.

Here, of course, I am referring to the better type of dancing resort. The Khan and I visited others where the women were graded according to the requirements of the clientele. Those establishments patronised by the men of the foreign fleets and military establishments naturally had a different type of dancer, and one prepared to take the rough with the smooth and emoluments much less than her sister in more favoured surroundings.

Below this line there are many other dancing establishments which are frankly and openly places of assignation and nothing else, in that the clientele cannot dance and does not expect to dance, and the "hostesses" are too worn and listless to take to anything more than a bed.

In the better class of establishment the Khan and I found much real companionship, and the very opposite to anything sensational, or exciting.

This we found in another strata, and among the so-called waitresses who are to be found in profusion in Shanghai and the other principal cities of China.

In many Shanghai restaurants of a certain type these

Russian waitresses are expected and encouraged to make themselves agreeable to customers. They require little or no raillery before they are on a customer's lap, and that is but the initial move to a nearby bedroom.

It was the Khan's old desire to try something new in the way of drugs that led us into our little adventure. We had been informed that there was a certain restaurant where the waitresses were not only more than food-servers, but knowledgeable in drugs as well. The Khan decided to visit this establishment.

With the inevitable guide we were directed to a dark and muddy road along which boards had been strewn to assist the pedestrian. We slipped and slithered over these and were at length brought up against a long wooden building across which the word "Bar" was emblazoned. The interior was far from prepossessing. There were a few tables covered with stained and dirty cloths dotted around a main room. This, presumably, was the restaurant. Five or six reed curtains indicated rooms leading off, and it required very little imagination to envisage these as bedrooms to which the waitresses removed their customers.

A disreputable Chinaman owned this forbidding establishment, and he was assisted by an immense "wife" of unknown breed.

She was dirty, she was shrilly vocal, and a large wart upon the middle of her many chins made her repulsive to look upon.

She greeted our arrival with an ingratiating smirk. Diffidently she enquired if we required food, and when we replied in the negative, she grinned maliciously, and clapped her immense hands. She had fingers as large

as plantains, and her wrists were as round and as hairy as a road labourer's—altogether, not the sort of woman one would have expected to find in an environment where feminine allure was one of the commodities on sale.

In response to her clapping five “girls” appeared. For convention's sake they wore the accepted garb of waitresses, yet the first glance made it obvious that any technique which they possessed did not concern such a mundane article of furniture as a table.

Also, to the initiated, they were most patently drug addicts.

The Khan and I looked at these poor creatures with some distaste, but the Khan shrugged his shoulders, and told the guide that we had come to smoke rather than to make free with the women.

The female mastiff in charge of the establishment gabbled to the guide, and he in turn told us that the girls were there to provide such pipes as we might require and for any other purpose we might desire. We had only to pay the price, we were assured, and the entire establishment was ours, and the “girl” waitresses were our slaves.

The woman gave an order to the girls and two of them appeared with bamboo pipes, the small lamps requisite to the occasion, and the dark globules of brown paste.

The Khan's eyes shone as he saw the latter, because he had been informed that here could be obtained a specially-prepared species of hashish, and he was anxious to experiment.

With deliberate ritual the girls prepared the pipes.

The sizzling beads of paste were thrust deftly into the pipes' pinholes, and slowly the Khan and I began to suck.

With another word from the ogress the girls retired and brought forth pipes of their own. They sat facing us—positive dregs of humanity. Their hair was unkempt and not properly washed; their clothes lacked refinement, and their finger nails spoke of much domestic toil behind the scenes. Neither of them would see her fortieth year again, and such efforts as they had made to simulate youthfulness were gauche and pathetic.

There was certainly a peculiar something about that hashish which was difficult to define. With the first few, slow draws my brain took on an extraordinary acuteness of perception. The wart on the chin of the grinning proprietress stood out clearly and sharply. I saw the women around me for exactly what they were. They were just-humans, deeply immersed in the drug vice, and their near presence made me squirm.

I smoked on, quietly, giving no expression to the whirling thoughts pounding within my brain.

I saw in hideous detail the filth and beastliness of the establishment. Clearly outlined to my roving eyes were the suggestive stains upon the dirty table cloths; I could see the yellow teeth of the Chinaman proprietor exposed in one, stupid, unending grin; and I saw his "wife" mentally adding up the dollars of which she would shortly mulct us.

The whole place was sordid and unclean. I became greatly depressed, and this feeling increased with every draw from the pipe.

I glanced covertly at the Khan to observe what were the effects of the drug upon him. With a start I realised that his reactions were entirely opposite to mine. This is the way of drugs—one can never be certain how individuals will react.

He had selected the most forbidding of the “girls” for his blandishments. He was smiling to himself, and murmuring.

He was looking fervently into this forsaken female’s eyes, and there was marked adoration in his own.

“She is more lovely than the dawn. Her eyes are more blue than the summer sea. Her hair is more radiant than the sunshine. There is not a flower in the whole world that can compare with her exquisite grace and loveliness!”

And, what is more, the Khan meant it. His drug-soaked brain had evolved a vision, and this unsavoury female was to him a veritable houri.

It sounded horrible and grotesque; almost I wanted to vomit.

“Khan Sahib,” I murmured. I endeavoured to distract his attention, but he behaved as if I were not there.

He continued with his stupid meanderings, and worse still, the woman to whom they were addressed responded with heavy coyness to his endearments.

Poor creature, I imagine that she was such a stranger to anything other than abuse and ill-treatment that even the burblings of a man rendered irresponsible by the effects of drug came as music to her ears.

She smiled up into his eyes, and stroked the hand that conveyed the pipe to the Khan’s lips.

Foolishly, the Khan went on:

“What beautiful hands; they are more transparent than pearls; what a delicate touch; it is lighter than the evening dew!”

To my abnormally heightened perceptions this was nauseating, but the Khan, even when completely master of himself, was never one to be deterred from any course upon which he had embarked.

The miserable harlot before him began to feel in her turn the promptings of the drug she was absorbing, and a lascivious light came to her eyes.

I will not say she practised the arts of seduction, for there was no artistry in the abandoned woman, but she leered, and there was no mistaking the invitation and all that it portended.

The Khan, gazing through a hazy, drug-derived cloud, saw but a beautiful vision, and he rose stumblingly to his feet.

It was at that moment that the woman laughed, and she displayed her gums. Then it was that I noticed the scabrous marks of past sores, and I realised to my horror that the woman was far gone with disease.

I too jumped to my feet, for the Khan must be prevented from lying with this woman at all costs.

“Khan Sahib,” I called imploringly.

He merely looked in my direction, and gave a stupid grin.

I caught him by the arm while the proprietor and the girls looked on and murmured angrily. The Khan thrust me savagely to one side, but again I caught him, this time by the shoulder. He spun round, and raised

his fist to strike me, yet even as he did so, he stayed his hand.

In turning he had faced the entrance to the restaurant, and I saw his eyes open quizzically.

I too turned, and saw massed in the doorway several Chinamen of forbidding appearance.

I glanced at the Chinese proprietor, and he was sweating with fear. My eyes took in his "wife," and the wart upon her chin was positively quivering in her agitation.

There was something electric in the atmosphere, and I sensed trouble.

Much of what transpired in the next ten minutes I learned later from the guide who had remained in the restaurant, crouching in a far corner with his pipe.

"The Hok Han," gasped the proprietor, and this was the name of a secret society or guild which allies itself especially with brothels and the like.

He turned savagely upon his helpmate, and for once she bowed her head before the tirade.

Apparently, the woman, greedy for money, had not paid the remittances which this and other societies habitually demand of brothel-house keepers for the "protection" which the societies are able to afford.

One of the men in the doorway gave vent to a torrent of rapidly-spoken Chinese, and even we could sense the menace in his words.

According to the guide, this man said that there were rich foreigners in the house, and the Hok Han must be paid.

We saw the proprietor look at us furtively, and touch his forehead.

There was a further spate of words from the doorway, the purport of which we were subsequently told, but the effects of which were soon too unpleasantly obvious.

The Hok Han, besides making certain that it received its dues, was bent upon teaching this recalcitrant restaurant proprietor a lesson.

There was a surging from behind the speaker, and half a dozen hefty henchmen entered the establishment. They smashed the tables and flung crockery to the floor and crunched it beneath their heels.

The proprietor remained silent and expressed his feelings by wringing his hands in anguish, but the women added to the general commotion by uninterrupted screaming and moaning.

A lusty scoundrel temporarily silenced the proprietor's wife by striking her across the face. There must have been something about her brutish grotesqueness which appealed to his sense of the requisite, for he picked her up as one would a bundle and disappeared with her into one of the bedrooms. In a few moments he reappeared smiling; she emerged a minute or so later, and I thought she seemed somewhat shaken. There was, however, a pleased twitching around the corners of her mouth which gave the lie to any feeling of outraged virtue.

As if to force home the insult offered to the house, the seducer strode straight up to the distressed owner as he pushed aside the reed curtaining, and deliberately

spat in his face. The frightened man gave a little moan, but made no effort to avenge the slight. Then one by one the girls were seized and were carried, protesting vehemently, into the bedrooms.

On two successive occasions the Khan and I had sought to escape by the door, but on each occasion we were thrust rudely back into the restaurant. I am pleased to think that the man who so cruelly hacked my shins was the one who selected the Khan's vision of delight.

When the place had been well and truly ravaged, the leader of the Hok Han turned to us. I admit that I met his gaze and that of his men with acute apprehension because we were in a very lowly neighbourhood, and no foreigner in China cares to fall foul of its many secret societies.

With a word we were roughly seized, and while we were held we were thoroughly searched.

Everything of value was taken from us and handed to the leader, who eyed us ironically during this humiliating procedure.

With a wicked smile he ordered his men to free us, then with mock ceremony he handed us severally one dollar each.

We could not understand what he said, but we sensed that we were free to depart.

Without a word we did so, and once free of the door we ran, quite disregarding our dignity.

The ribald laughter of the Hok Han men followed us up that noisome street, but it only served to speed our footsteps.

Back in the Hotel Europe we took stock.

The Khan had been mulcted of roughly two hundred pounds. I had lost about eleven. Yet, on reflection, we considered ourselves lucky.

This was one of our experiences upon which the Khan would never afterwards dilate. He forbade me ever to mention the incident.

It was not one of those which he was proud to recall.

CHAPTER IV

FAN TAN AND PRISON

It was in a fan-tan house in Hong Kong that we met him. He told us his name, and I believe it was Tim Yai Yung, or it may have been Nim Yai Yung. Always in my mind, however, he has remained as Tim. It was the nearest approach I could make to his initial name, and my pronunciation appeared to amuse him. Tim he was to us, and Tim he will be always.

We treated him cautiously at first because he had something of the air of the men who had maltreated us so grievously in the Chinese restaurant, but when over innumerable pipes we got to know him better, we casually mentioned the Hok Han society in order to observe his reactions. He curled his lip with scorn at the sound of the name, and in his curious pidgin English, informed us that although powerful, the Hok Han was an organisation composed entirely of bullies who preyed upon the Chinese prostitutes and demanded heavy fees for "protection." It even enlarged its sphere to include the lower types of foreign prostitutes when the "patron" was a Chinaman, or a man easily to be intimidated.

With an absurd excess of caution—for the drug had got well into his brain—he gravely informed us that he was a member of the Kuan Yi, a secret organisation which also had its roots in the brothel trade and the

prostitute traffic, but which, he ceremoniously assured us, carried out all its obligations honourably. Without the Kuan Yi, he said, the vast trade in Chinese women could not be honourably maintained, for not only did it protect the women who entered the profession and saw that they were properly treated, but it acted as agents and go-betweens, and frequently maintained girls for considerable periods before they were detailed to a congenial post.

Our encounter with Tim took place in Hong Kong. By that time he had disposed of several pipes, and was beginning to wax loquacious. He told us in his dreamy way that he had that day concluded several contracts with poor parents living in the provinces. We were not particularly interested at first, but we pricked up our ears when we learned that the merchandise had been three young girls. Apparently he had bought these children from their parents for a period of years on "speculation," and he was well pleased with his purchases, for the girls had proved to be comely. They promised to fetch him considerable sums when he passed them into concubinage or into the maw of some brothel.

Later, he told us more of this traffic—and this was before we knew him as a member of the secret society of the Kuan Yi.

We asked him whether the traffic was recognised, and he merely laughed.

The girls, he informed us, were not bought as prostitutes. Nothing so blatant as that would appeal to the astute Chinese mind. What actually happened was that poor Chinese parents were induced to part with

their female children to "foster parents" for a consideration. The "adopted daughters" were then removed to Shanghai, Hong Kong, or some other likely centre, where they were retained until they were able to go out to "service."

By the time a girl is ready for a brothel she owes her "foster parents" a considerable sum representing the amount spent on food and clothes. Sometimes she is sold outright to a brothel keeper. More often than not she is "pawned" for a period during which time she receives food and lodging from the brothel keeper, and nothing else. Half of her earnings are retained by the brothel keeper against her "account" for clothing and finery, and the other half is handed to the "foster parent," ostensibly to wipe out the debt she has incurred.

When I asked if there was any legal obligation resting either upon the girl prostitute or the brothel-keeper to maintain the terms of such a contract, Tim sucked at his pipe and puckered up his slit-like eyes.

The Chinese, he insisted with extreme gravity, are honourable in all their transactions, and do not require to know whether a contract is legal or otherwise. Sufficient is it that it has been entered into.

In point of actual fact, he said, both the prostitute and the brothel-keeper could repudiate any obligation, for no court of law would maintain such a contract, yet in practice all concerned—the girl, whether she be pawned or sold, and the keeper of the establishment which receives her—consider themselves under an honourable obligation to repay any sums which may have been stipulated.

When I asked how long these girls were required to practice their trade before they could consider themselves free—and this was after several meetings and when we had secured Tim's confidence—he said that they were free at any time—once they had paid.

I allowed him to smoke on quietly, because I gathered that there was much more than this behind the innuendo.

Presently he picked up the conversation as if it had never been broken—a very usual thing with drug addicts and something which is apt to prove disconcerting when first encountered.

If the girl be a good prospect from the point of view of the brothel owner, her release from her obligations is practically as simple—in theory; but in practice the reverse is the case.

I do not even try to reproduce Tim's pidgin English, so I paraphrase as I go along.

Once within a brothel, Tim explained, the owner was entitled to place a commercial figure upon the girl's body, and if she proved to be one who drew custom, the owner was entitled to revalue her from time to time. Consequently, should a comely girl desire to break loose from prostitution, she found that the price put upon her body was an exorbitant one and thus, to all intents and purposes, she remained the slave of the brothel-keeper for all time.

Usually the only manner in which a girl of this class could secure her release was to find some man who might wish to marry her, and here it might be said that little stigma attaches to the profession of prostitution in China.

Here Tim threw a curious sidelight on the mentality of these Chinese prostitutes. He assured us that even when a marriage had been arranged and a girl was assured of the support of her prospective husband in any financial transaction with the brothel-keeper, she would be by no means inclined to side with her husband-to-be in the matter of her release price. Rather would she do her utmost to see that the largest possible figure was paid to the brothel-keeper, in the belief that her own social standing would thereby be enhanced. Evidently to be able to claim that a husband was forced to disgorge a small fortune in order to secure a wife's release from a brothel gives a certain *cachet* to the lady in the case.

Perhaps it was our evident interest in matters of this kind that induced Tim to wag his tongue to greater purpose when we mentioned the Hok Han.

He intimated that his own guild of the Kuan Yi was continually at enmity with the Hok Han, and that there had been a number of sanguinary encounters between the two rival bodies.

He assured us also that his own person was the target for much of this enmity because he had been successful in curtailing many of the activities of the Hok Han.

We asked him if he were not afraid to pass through the streets alone, and quietly to smoke in a fan tan house without protection.

He merely added a few more wrinkles to his puckered eyes and gave the Chinese equivalent to a smile.

Almost nonchalantly he told us that quite half of the

habitués of this seemingly inoffensive and innocent fan tan house were members of his guild.

We received this information with something akin to shock; for many nights we had been foregathering with men of a powerful Chinese secret society, and had singled out one of its principals to provide us with conversation and amusement.

I caught the eye of the Khan as he digested this information, and his face was a picture.

For myself, I did not know whether to be amused or to seek safety in instant flight, but then, I reflected, we had come and gone at our own sweet pleasure heretofore, and there was no reason to suppose that Tim's revelations would make the slightest difference to our understanding.

Obviously the Khan thought likewise, for after an interval he continued to pull at his pipe, and the conversation lost its sense of strain.

We went again and again to the fan tan house, and on the occasions when Tim was there no further reference was made either to the Hok Han or to the Kuan Yi. Perhaps it was that Tim regretted his indiscretion, or perhaps he thought he had digressed sufficiently before strangers.

The subject was mutually taboo until one night when the peace of the fan tan house was broken by the rattle of shots.

Tim leaped to his feet and uttered the one word "Hok Han," and unceremoniously pushed us through a doorway. We fell rather than walked down stone steps to a cellar, and listened with growing amazement to the sounds of continued battle up above. The

fighters—to judge from the nature of the reports—had a varied armoury. I could distinguish the bark of repeating pistols and the harsher boom of shot-guns. Interspersed with the whole came repercussions which shook the building. Some light-hearted person was improving the occasion by throwing bombs.

We were in complete darkness in the cellar and had no means of determining how the battle was proceeding, and were still in a condition of amazed apprehension when the door above was burst open and half a dozen furiously fighting men tumbled pell-mell down the steps. The broken door above admitted a half-light, and we could see knives at work among the grunting, gasping bodies which swirled madly around us.

We could only cower against the walls and do our small best not to become embroiled in the actual fighting. Indeed, there was no other recourse open to us. We had no weapons, and we had no means of distinguishing between friend or foe—even if we could go to the sanguine extreme and regard the Kuan Yi as friendly in such circumstances, and the Hok Han as otherwise.

I know not what would have been the end of that fight if there had not been a further interruption.

Above the din of combat in the cellar I became vaguely aware that all was much quieter up above; then came an authoritative voice from the door, and someone gasped the word "police."

We were scooped up in the net and rushed off to Victoria Jail. On the way the Khan insisted that whatever happened we must refuse to reveal our real

names. We must, he ordered, plead that we were but visitors to the fan tan house, and had nothing whatever to do with either the Hok Han or the Kuan Yi.

We were examined, but from the manner in which the questions were thrust at us it was clear that we were regarded with the deepest suspicion and were considered as part and parcel of the gang which had been arrested. I still think the Khan would have been well advised to have disclosed his identity, but this he adamantly refused to do. Neither would he consult a lawyer lest this too should lead to his identification.

He was certain that when we came up in court his ingenious explanations would secure our immediate release, and I perforce had to submit and follow his lead.

Never, I think, will I forget that morning in court. Neither the Khan nor I had had much opportunity to improve our appearance, and notwithstanding our natural endeavour to remain on the outer edge of that wild scene in the cellar we had been pushed and scraped along the filthy walls during the press and burly of the fighting. Neither of us looked much better than the Chinamen with whom we were charged, and there was still this matter of identity.

The Khan, true to his purpose, had destroyed any papers which might have given any indication as to his status, and when we were required to state whether we pleaded guilty or not guilty to riotous behaviour, and to a string of other charges concerning the possession and use of lethal weapons, the Khan merely grunted.

"Am I to take that as a plea of guilty?" the man

on the bench asked sarcastically, and I could contain myself no longer.

"We plead not guilty. We were there merely as visitors, and we have nothing to do with the Hok Han or the Kuan Yi."

I heard the gasp which went round the court as I uttered these appallingly stupid words.

The court, vastly interested, addressed itself to me.

"So you were there only as visitors?"

Dumbly I nodded my head.

"You know practically nothing of Hong Kong?"

Again I nodded, and I bit my lips with mortification, for I knew what was coming.

"Yet, you can speak of the Kuan Yi and the Hok Han?"

"Perhaps I spoke without real knowledge," I stammered. "When the fighting broke out, and before we took refuge in the cellar, I overheard several comments. Perhaps I have jumped to conclusions. . . ."

"Yet they were sufficiently conclusive for you to volunteer a definite statement!"

I could hear the suppressed murmuring at the back of the court, and I could feel the perspiration running down my body. My position was so completely unenviable that I cursed the Khan at that moment.

My tormenter turned to the Khan, and gave him a little of his vituperative tongue.

"What have you to say?" he enquired loftily. "Neither you nor the prisoner with you have given any names or addresses, and you ask the court to believe that you are respectable!"

I was glad of the respite which this interrogation

gave me, but I blushed with the Khan at the implied insult. I know that we appeared as a couple of ruffians, but we had been more or less innocently embroiled, even if appearances were against us.

I saw the Khan pull himself up with dignity, and I trembled for the indiscretions *he* might make.

"I think that I can say in all truth that I am as respectable as you!" The words were scornful, and I saw the man on the bench wince at this exhibition of *lèse majesté*.

"Do you plead guilty, or not guilty?" the words were snapped out with obvious impatience.

"It should be clear to any self-respecting court that I am not guilty!"

The Khan was becoming angry, and was not improving the situation.

The figure upon the bench smiled, and picked up a pen.

"I am prepared to believe that you and your associate are in a different category from the other prisoners. . . ."

I began to take hope as I heard these words, and nudged the Khan in an endeavour to keep him quiet.

"In the circumstances I will dismiss the charges against both of you. . . ."

The magistrate began to flick over the pages of his charge sheet, and there was a perceptible pause.

I heard the Khan cough irritably, but I was almost engulfed in the surging thought that I should shortly be free.

"... in as far as they relate to the possession and use of weapons. . . ."

So the man had been playing with us after all. I gulped, and still hoped for the best.

"You have, however, seen fit to come here and make play with the court. Not only have you refused your names and all description of yourselves, but your conduct here has been the reverse of decorous. Almost has it amounted to contempt of court. However, I will dismiss all thought of your unseemly behaviour from my mind, and—on the charge of riotous behaviour. . . "

He began to write with his pen.

" . . . the sentence will be three months! "

The Khan stiffened at my side. He choked back the rush of words that leaped to his throat, and he shrugged his shoulders. I looked at him dumbly, still expecting him to speak, but he remained silent, and we were ushered below.

As we stumbled down the steps I heard the voice of the magistrate intimating that he would adjourn the case against the Chinese prisoners in order to allow the police to conduct further investigations.

We were taken to the jail, and thrust into cells. My evening meal was a tin of horrible stew which stank to Heaven, and a piece of revolting-looking bread. The clothes which I had been made to wear were horrible, and ill-fitting, and the thought of spending three long months in such a terrible environment turned my bones to water.

Next morning I was taken out for exercise with sundry other prisoners, the Khan among them, and later given my "task." I was presented with a pile of ropes ends, and I had to tear them to pieces for the hemp which they contained. Instead of tearing these

heavy, tightly-twisted ropes, I tore my fingers instead.

I was taken away from this task and ushered down stone-flagged passages to a small outhouse where I was made to confront a camera. I was taken full face, and side face, and as a further indignity my bleeding fingers were seized and pressed upon an inked pad. I had had my fingerprints taken!

I was determined, whatever happened, that I was not going back to those hempen ropes, so at the first opportunity I informed the guard that I wished to see the doctor.

He glanced at me surlily, and enquired what was the matter, gratuitously offering the information at the same time that any proved case of malingering was met with a "dose" of solitary confinement.

For answer I held out my fingers, but the man only grinned.

"You'll soon get used to that," he said unfeelingly. "What do you suppose you come in here for—a rest cure?"

He became the guard again immediately, however, and produced his report pad.

"You have made a request to see the doctor," he said gruffly. "Do you still want to go through with it?"

"Yes," I said.

"Yes, sir!" when you speak to me," he retaliated. Yet he wrote down my request all the same, and locked me in my cell.

An hour later the lock turned, and a beckoning thumb bade me follow its owner. I was taken to the hospital ward where the doctor regarded me curiously

once he had examined my fingers. I suppose the fact that what remained of my nails were well manicured gave him food for thought.

"What are you in for?" he asked almost kindly.

"Riotous behaviour," I replied in the approved manner of prisoners.

"And were you very riotous?" He was human enough to smile.

"I was unfortunate. I was caught up in a brawl, and I was arrested with the rest."

"And how long will you be with us?"

"Three months!"

The doctor said nothing. The blank mask of officialdom had descended once again.

He ordered an orderly to take my temperature, but it was the doctor himself who removed the thermometer from my mouth.

I could see that the mercury recorded "normal," but the doctor, after a brief glance, gravely intoned "One hundred and one point five," and an attentive prison orderly recorded his kindly lie.

I was given a bed in the hospital ward, and an immense dose of castor oil. I protested violently when this nauseous medicine was produced for my delectation, but the orderly insisted that it was the necessary perquisite of all prisoners on admittance to the hospital ward. Rather than give offence to the doctor who had so humanely stretched a point, I swallowed the vile concoction and spent the remainder of the day heaving.

There was no sleep for me that night for the place was most horribly verminous. My pillow, such as it

was, was invaded by battalions of bugs who regarded it as their lawful exercise ground.

In desperation I jumped from my bed, and was promptly shouted at by an orderly. Either I went immediately back to bed, he said, or he would have to call the guard, and that would mean, sooner or later, a visit to the "solitary" cells which all prisoners, without any exception, appeared to regard with the greatest dread.

I crept back to bed, and was consumed by bugs.

For three further days I endured this torture, then the doctor came and asked me if I was well enough to get up.

He smiled as he did so, and there was a suspicious quivering at the corners of his mouth when he added the information that I was required in the office of the prison superintendent.

Wondering what heinous offence I had committed, and with a great weight in my heart, I tumbled into my clothes and was marched along more corridors to the superintendent's office.

I wondered why most prison officers feel it incumbent upon them to shout.

"Attention!" yelled a man at my elbow.

"Silence," roared the superintendent.

Already in the small office was the Khan, a bedraggled, unkempt figure, with a very pronounced droop to the mouth. His finger tips were covered in coarse bandages, and he was a picture of the most abject misery.

The superintendent coughed, and busied himself with some papers at his desk. Even his cough was

loud, and he turned the papers with a violent gesture. I suppose that it added to his sense of importance. The fact that he had of necessity already perused the documents and was fully aware of their contents is quite by the way.

"When you were charged," said this official magisterially, "you refused to give your names!"

I at least nodded acquiescence.

"Or to give any account of yourselves?"

"Right, sir!"

I took a quick glance at the Khan. The readiness with which he produced the "Sir" literally amazed me.

"You realise that this attitude which you so stupidly took has involved the police in a great deal of trouble?"

"You mean . . . ?"

The Khan, very abashed, found it impossible to complete the sentence.

"Of course I mean it. What are the police for? You don't suppose that it took them very long to check up on you, do you?"

Apparently he expected no answer, for he went on:

"With the discovery of your identity your case has been reviewed. . . ."

I experienced a bursting feeling of elation, and waited impatiently for this tiresome man to proceed.

"It has been decided that you shall be released—on certain conditions."

He glared at us speculatively, as if waiting to be asked what were the conditions. However, both the Khan and I remained silent. For my own part I only waited to hear the conditions. Whatever they were I

would have accepted them in order to get out of that awful place.

“The conditions are that you return to your hotel, and prepare yourselves to leave Hong Kong within three days.”

That was one of the easiest conditions I had ever heard. For my part I hoped never to see Hong Kong again once I had got free of the city.

“Do you accept these conditions?”

“Yes, sir,” responded the Khan—humbly.

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That night, in the blissful luxury of the hotel, the Khan asked me something of my experiences.

When I told him that I had been in the hospital ward, and the manner of my treatment there, he nearly died of mortification. He looked angrily at his hands, then at mine, and poured forth maledictions upon his own stupidity. Then he turned sulky. He would have nothing more to do with me that night. Next day, under the influence of a refreshing sleep, he had thawed somewhat, but he never really forgave me for having failed to endure humiliations which could produce a subservient “Sir” with such alacrity.

CHAPTER XV

FLOWER BOATS OF CANTON

THE next night we boarded a steamer for Canton. Why Canton, goodness only knows. Perhaps it was because it was reasonably near Hong Kong and therefore the first name that suggested itself to the Khan.

The boat we boarded was the usual type of river steamer with grilles to protect the bridge and the bullion rooms, and with armed guards pacing around the decks. Seemingly hundreds of third-class passengers were huddled below in a space which one would normally say would not hold eighty. They were shut off from the rest of the ship by steel grilles, for it is usually among the third-class passengers that the Bias Bay pirates hide before overpowering the guards and taking possession of a ship.

I confess that I was agreeably surprised with Canton; it offered so much in the way of diversity. Its streets are so narrow that a person standing in the middle can almost touch the houses on either side, and there ensue so many amusing contretemps with warring rickshaw pullers that the minutes are never dull. Normally there is just room for two rickshaws to pass, but often there is a collision, and then there are fireworks!

To listen to two Chinese rickshaw men cursing each

other is an education, even though one is unable to understand a single word of the language.

To us the famous shawl and jade shops meant little. Neither did the ivory shops or those occupied by those clever craftsmen who make such wonderful pictures with the feathers of the kingfisher.

The Khan desired nothing more than to forget his unfortunate experiences in prison, but every time he beheld his torn hands he cursed.

As I scratched my aggrieved person the Khan would smile, and once when my irritation got the better of me, and I swore roundly, he actually laughed. He was fast getting back to normal.

One night we took a rickshaw, and we were pulled over the canal which divides Canton proper from Shameen. At the water front the Khan paid off the rickshaw coolie, and we hired a sampan. We wriggled past hundreds of junks, and finally came upon the flat-bottomed boats which, ranged closely together, house the gaily-decorated floating brothels of Canton.

The so-called flower boat is one of the sights of Canton, and it is peculiar to that city. At night these floating brothels are highly illuminated with coloured lights, and there must be over five hundred of them, all with their complement of Chinese prostitutes. Ranged along the water front there are literally thousands of women earning their livelihood, and that of countless hangers-on, by the sale of their bodies, and even these thousands do not cover the whole of the prostitute community of this great city.

Once in China one has speedily to realise when dealing with this peculiar aspect of life that one is con-

fronted with figures which are almost astronomical. The prostitutes are legion, and it is humanly impossible to escape their notice.

In the international settlement of Shanghai, for instance, where the licensing system for prostitutes has been virtually abolished, the officials estimate that there are approximately five thousand "clandestine" prostitutes within the city. My experience has always been that officialdom is invariably apt to err when required to furnish statistics such as these, and that the women, being "clandestine," cannot be adequately numbered. In all probability the number of prostitutes still plying their trade in the Shanghai settlement is nearer twenty thousand than five.

These women are "clandestine" only in that they resort to their livelihood in clandestine brothels. They can be seen in hundreds in certain of the main streets of the settlement every night, openly soliciting. Usually they have amahs with them to assist them in accosting likely men.

In the French settlement at Shanghai where licensing is still practiced there are twelve hundred women on the books, and this probably represents but ten per cent of the women in that area who make their living by prostitution, and who have no other calling.

We paddled alongside the flower boats, and for the most part the Khan ignored the many invitations which we received to enter these floating brothels.

Nevertheless, I was distinctly uneasy. After our past experiences I had no great longing to be inveigled on board one of these craft, for they bear the most dubious of reputations.

In the main they are patronised by the shifting population of Canton River—the thousand and one junkmen, the sampan men, and those engaged in the drug traffic. Here too are to be found, if accounts be true, a goodly collection of those ruffians who are pirates by trade and heritage. They are there seeking relaxation and information in respect to cargoes, and such men price life at a much lower level than more ordinary merchandise.

Bluejackets from the British and American ships also patronise these establishments, but as they invariably move about in bands, and as experience has told that swift retribution follows an attack upon a man in uniform, they are normally allowed their pleasures without let or hindrance.

Sometimes the more foolhardy of tourists in search of the erotic and the peculiar will go on board these brothels, and almost invariably it proves a most expensive experience.

The men of the secret guilds who protect the women of these boats are also well able to protect their own interests, and in the very sure knowledge that the average tourist will do almost anything to escape the publicity which would attend an "incident" aboard a flower boat, it is customary to intimidate him, and to mulct him of the greatest amount possible.

Quite apart from this, however, much that is definitely sinister occurs aboard these boats. They have their being upon a murky waterway; they extend their invitation to men only at night, and there is much that happens upon Canton River which would not bear investigation.

As we went slowly by we could see into the interior of many of these gaily illuminated boats. All had the characteristic square facade built of light trellis work, and within was a restaurant of sorts, and, of course, the attendant ladies.

It was typical of the Khan to embark upon a sight-seeing tour such as this. With the whole world to choose from he must embark upon Canton River, and float lazily around the worst brothels on earth. I knew that sooner or later the urge would come upon him to make a closer investigation, for already he was smiling at some of the blandishments which were hurled at us, and I would have had him elsewhere.

"Don't you think we have seen enough of the night life of China?" I hazarded.

The Khan cast a sour look at me.

"Must you always tread on my coat-tails?" he rejoined, and he looked down at his hands, and swore.

My interjection, considering the circumstances, could hardly have been less happily chosen, but with a man of moods like the Khan it was always impossible to predict how he would react to any given suggestion.

"Why do you always put the damper on everything?" proceeded the Khan, his eyes glittering with something akin to animosity.

"Consider the place and its reputation," I replied moodily.

"The places are well lighted, and—the ladies appear amiable."

"They are *not* ladies."

"But they can't hurt us."

"If I have my way they won't get the chance!"

them with largesse, and apologised for our inability to stay longer with them that night.

Promising to call again on the morrow, and assuring the old lady in charge that he had had a delightful evening, and would most certainly return for more of her fare, he rose to depart.

We found that our sampan man had departed, but dismissing this trivial incident from our minds, we hailed another, and set off upstream.

Thankful that we had emerged from the flower boat so easily, I took in the night air in great gulps, and gazed idly around me at the coloured lights, and at the line of junks in the far distance.

The Khan too seemed glad to meet the air after the oppressive atmosphere within the flower boat, and he did not order the sampan man to land us. Instead, we went gently on, soothed by the gentle swishing of the water, and considerably refreshed by the breeze which met our damp brows.

We passed beyond the flower boats and began to drift beneath the sterns of the long line of junks. I gazed with idle curiosity upon the ungainly, yet immensely strong wooden craft. They have scarcely changed in design over the centuries, and there is still the absolute minimum of iron in their construction.

It was while actually beneath the high-packed bow of one of these craft that the catastrophe happened. A large baulk of timber became disengaged from the junk's deck, and came hurtling riverwards. I saw it coming, but there was absolutely nothing that I could do. I saw it turning in the air, and I sat there motionless, entirely bereft of all power of movement. I

wanted to extend a puny hand to fend off the baulk, yet in that single second of time my muscles refused to obey the feeble promptings of my brain. It was as well that they did for the log must have weighed several hundredweights.

It fell, and hit the side of the sampan a glancing blow. There was a sound of splintering wood, and our small craft rocked dangerously. I held on, with absurd strength, to the gunwale, apprehensively awaiting the cessation of motion. I gazed vaguely at the craft's dirty floorboards, hoping thereby to escape some of the worst effects of the violent rocking. The things we do in moments of stress when we know ourselves to be helpless are frequently grotesque. I only know that I saw my one hope of salvation within the interior of the sampan.

Long before the rocking ceased, however, water began to take the place of the floorboards, and it became distressingly obvious that we had been holed, and holed badly.

The sampan man, shouting curses, attracted the attention of those in the junk, and a rough rope ladder was thrown down to us with commendable promptitude, and no little skill. Up this we swarmed to the junk's decks, from where we saw the sampan slowly drift on, and eventually sink.

Men around us jabbered in guttural Chinese, and the Khan and I, considerably bewildered by the swift sequence of events, could only look on vacantly.

One of the thinnest and tallest Chinese I have ever seen emerged from below, and elbowed his way through the gesticulating crew, and to my relief he produced

that pidgin English which seems to be the accomplishment of so many who frequent the Chinese waterfronts.

He folded his arms over his chest, and bowed gravely.

Profusely he apologised for the clumsiness of his crew and for the dire calamity which had befallen us.

Would we honorable gentlemen honour him by resting awhile in his cabin, and perhaps partake of a little refreshment?

The Khan and I glanced at each other. We were both somewhat shaken, and a rest and perhaps some Chinese tea would not come amiss.

With equal courtesy the Khan accepted the invitation for both of us, and indicating the way to his small, but excessively ornate cabin, the tall Chinaman ordered refreshment.

Again he assured us how mortified he was that such an accident should have befallen us, and at the clumsy hands of one of his crew.

He asked if we would like the man responsible well and truly flogged, and when we hastily demurred, he shook his head, almost as if we had deprived him of pleasure.

A man appeared bringing vessels containing an opaque fluid. Without trespassing upon the province of a guest I endeavoured to ascertain its nature, and noticing my interest, and perhaps momentary hesitation, our host smilingly explained.

"It is scented rice-water," he said. "It is very good—yes? Try!"

We tried. It was a fragrant drink, and very satisfying, but I had been mistaken regarding its potency.

It was a treacherous liquid, and the smiling face of our host began alternately to lengthen, and then to broaden in absurd imagery.

I distinctly remember the Khan smacking his lips and demanding more of the beverage. That is all. After that there was a fading, and—oblivion.

When I came to my senses it was day. I was lying upon a bunk, and I could hear the gentle swishing of water against the junk's sides.

I had no headache, and I had a clear impression of nearly all that had happened the evening before—if it was the evening before.

Suddenly I sat up in the bunk with a start. I had felt the junk lurch. This, coupled with the continual swishing of water could mean only one thing—we were under weigh.

CHAPTER XVI

THROUGH THE NOSE

I SCRAMBLED from my bunk, and gazed around the small apartment in which I found myself. It was low, and there was about two inches of head room when I stood upright. There was no opening as such, and what light there was came from slits about two inches wide close to the wooden upper deck. They were there principally to provide ventilation, I assumed.

On a bunk above that upon which I had been placed was a figure breathing heavily. It was the Khan.

I took a step backwards the better to view his features, and I hit the opposite wall. Then I realised for the first time that we were in a compartment roughly as large as an English railway carriage.

I shook and pummelled the Khan roughly, and eventually induced in him some semblance of life.

It took me some time to din into his head that we were still on the junk, and that the vessel was no longer tied up to the Canton River water-front. When finally he did comprehend, he sat up with a jerk—the veritable man of fire and action.

The crack which he sustained upon the top of his head was the only redeeming feature of our embarrassing predicament, but I considered some of the language

he flung in my direction to be unnecessarily provocative, and amazingly unseemly. After all, it had not been my picnic, and I had demurred from the first.

"Have you tried the door?" he growled.

I tried the door, with the inevitable result.

"Bang on it," he snarled. "Kick it—knock it down!"

I banged and I kicked, and I hurt my shoulder in a futile endeavour to make it move. Still he was not satisfied.

"Perhaps the handle only wants turning," he sneered.

"You try," I suggested.

He leaped from the bunk, and fumbled.

There was no handle. In other circumstances I would have grinned.

We both sat upon my bunk, our heads in our hands.

"What now?" growled the Khan.

"I suggest we shout," I answered weakly.

We shouted, loudly and raucously, but our only answer was the creaking of the junk, and the continual swishing of water.

"I shall complain to the police!" The Khan sat there, his lips pouting petulantly.

"Do!" I responded gravely. He turned his back upon me, and sulked.

After an interval, he drew himself together, and initiated a personal campaign of battery against the door. I let him do it, principally because it might have the effect of attracting attention, and also because it kept him occupied.

He turned to me, panting in his fury.

"This is an outrage," he roared.

"Of course," I answered in a bedside voice.

He favoured me with a look of utter disdain, but I was becoming rapidly tired of the Khan, and it meant little to me.

There came a noise from the other side of the door, and we stood back. We saw the door move slowly, and cautiously; then it was flung wide.

Our tall Chinaman was there, stooping to accommodate his height to the lowness of the apartment.

"I regret the necessity," he lisped, and he bowed gravely.

The Khan dashed in his direction, but with a surprising dexterity the man placed two dishes upon the floor, elbowed the Khan backwards, retreated through the door, and closed it with a slam.

The Khan and I looked at each other in bewilderment; then we examined the dishes. They were filled with very watery rice.

We were hungry; so we ate.

After we had finished the loathsome meal the Khan looked at me moodily.

"What do you think this means?" he asked, a certain pleading in his tone.

"We have been kidnapped," I retorted. "What else can it mean?"

The Khan gave a stifled cry, and his expression became even more abject.

"Here we are on a Chinese junk," I continued, rubbing it in. "We are cooped up in a foul cubby-hole, and we are fed like prisoners with bowls of dirty rice. The junk is off—goodness knows where—probably to

Bias Bay, and—because of all that has occurred there is literally no one to whom we can appeal. . . .”

“You think they will want money?” The Khan viewed the prospect with evident distaste.

“Lots, and—these men have very persuasive ways from all accounts—first an ear, then the tip of the nose; then perhaps a finger. . . .”

“Don’t,” snarled my employer. “Don’t you think I have been through enough?”

I left him to his thoughts, and moodily contemplated the rough planking of the cabin’s floor.

Quite apart from my airiness, I knew that we were in a hole. The fact that we were still upon the junk was in itself suspicious, but the manner in which the junk’s captain had approached us left nothing to doubt. We were there for a purpose, and that purpose could only be the extraction of ransom.

I had other thoughts, rather more lugubrious. With the Khan the finding of a large sum of money would provide few difficulties, but with me the matter was different. The Khan would have to meet any sum put upon my head, and in his present mood he was quite equal to turning contumacious, and leaving me to fend for myself.

I had been a little too outspoken in some of my comments of late, and he had resented my presumption.

For three days were we left in this confined cabin, and, as can be imagined, the time passed exceedingly slowly. For the most part the Khan was inclined to be surly, and to blame me for the predicament in which we found ourselves.

He argued that we had spent a perfectly blameless

evening, and that if I had been anything of a man I would have been prepared for such an eventuality as a falling log, and would have taken due precautions.

Such an argument was, of course, untenable, but I, as an employee, had tactfully to accept the suggestion, not knowing what was eventually to happen to us, and how deeply I would have to rely upon the Khan's good nature.

On the third day the door opened some time after we had been provided with our rice, and several men stalked into the confined space.

They seized us without a word, and conveyed us to the captain's cabin. Our long Chinaman was there waiting for us, and he bade us take up our position against the furthest wall. His men ranged themselves alongside, and the scene reminded me rather of pictures I had seen of revolutionary court-martials.

"I regret the inconvenience to which you have been put," he said, when we had been stationed according to his satisfaction, "but I think you will agree that matters might have been much worse."

To reproduce his actual phraseology is beyond me at this stage, and I can do no more than give the purport.

The Khan started to splutter, but the Chinaman roughly enjoined silence.

"See how much worse it would have been if you had not decided to take a sampan, and when once in the sampan, to float lazily upon the river! "

I could make neither head nor tail of this, but the man's subsequent remarks were sufficiently illuminating.

"After you left your hotel I had you followed. We—wanted you!"

I believe that he thoroughly enjoyed the situation, for he watched our evident mystification with every indication of relish.

"You were followed into the flower boat, and it was arranged that one of our sampan men should be there to receive you when you came out.

"That piece of timber was no accident—it fell with a purpose. You were kind enough to offer no protest when the sampan man took you along the line of junks, and what followed was the natural consequence of your stupidity."

"What does all this mean?"

The Khan found his tongue at last, but he was silenced.

"All in good time, gentlemen. All in good time. I will inform you when your time comes to speak."

The Khan, however, refused to lie quietly under such arbitrary treatment.

"What do you mean," he demanded, "when you say that we were followed from our hotel?"

The Chinaman grinned before replying. "You were not only followed from your hotel," he said gravely, "but from Hong Kong! You made a number of indiscreet remarks in court which have caused us considerable trouble."

"I hardly said a word." The Khan was indignant.

"I agree, but your servant did—on your behalf!"

So this junk captain knew of our respective positions. It would be interesting to learn of what else he knew. He did not keep us long in doubt.

“For your indiscretions in mentioning the name of a certain guild, you will have to pay. The amount has already been settled, and a full enquiry has been made into your financial ability to meet the amount.”

The captain looked hard at the Khan, and eyed him quizzically. Perhaps he expected some protest, but my employer was breathing too hard readily to give speech.

“That is that,” proceeded the long Chinaman, as if disposing of something of little consequence and in respect to which there could be no argument, “but—there is something else!”

All suspicion of raillery had now disappeared from his voice, and he eyed the Khan like some stern school-master would a delinquent pupil. He addressed him personally.

“Hitherto you have confined your attention to those who secure their livelihood so honourably in brothels. Chinese girls willingly become prostitutes in order to maintain their parents, and there is no dishonour attaching to them. Rather are they to be applauded for what they do, and those who consort with them assist in a good cause.”

It was impossible to tell whether the man was stating a case—for he was undoubtedly connected with the traffic in some guise—or whether he really subscribed to what he said. I am inclined to the latter theory. However, he was not haranguing us for nothing. In his Chinese way he was leading up to a point. He disclosed it quickly enough.

“In the hotel, there was a maid!”

I saw the Khan start.

“ And, you had made friendly overtures to her! ”

I glanced hurriedly at the Khan, and his amazement and obvious guilt were equally apparent. This was something of which I knew nothing, and I was staggered by the amount of information at this man's disposal.

“ That maid was a married woman, and—her husband a member of my crew! ”

I heard the Khan grunt, but still he said nothing.

“ And you are probably aware of the Chinese law in such circumstances—it holds that the aggrieved husband may kill the wife and her paramour, provided that he does so single-handed, and without assistance! ”

I vouchsafed another quick glance at my companion. His face had become suddenly lined, and his forehead was moist with perspiration.

“ I have to inform you that this woman is dead! ”

The long Chinaman waited a moment for his information to sink home.

“ Her husband,” he added pleasantly, by way of further information, “ claimed his right! ”

A long and poignant silence followed his words. The Khan shuffled his feet and gasped from time to time, but could still find no words to meet the accusation which had been levelled against him, and the direct imputation respecting the consequences.

These revelations made me considerably apprehensive, because of the Khan's guilt there was no doubt. Moreover, when this man referred to the Chinese custom on the matter of a wife's love-making, he spoke nothing less than the truth.

If a wife is caught indulging in an affair with another

man she is lucky if she is merely divorced and returned to her parents, and the law on the subject is quite clear. Should the husband so desire he may dispose of his wife and of her lover, and a benevolent magistrate may even award him kudos for so doing. The law too lays down that should a wife's lover kill a husband then he must be sentenced to death by strangling.

As I have indicated, this long Chinaman did not misquote the law, but where he grossly exaggerated was in its implications. From his words one would have inferred that the Chinese married women as a class are remarkably constant. Actually, the very reverse is the case, and the reason for this is not far to seek. Not only do the men support several wives, but many of them have concubines in addition. And, there is the Chinese custom of abstaining from intercourse with a wife during the whole of the period of pregnancy, and until the child has been weaned. As many Chinese children are suckled until they reach the age of two or three the husband asks much of the female if he expects her to maintain her affections.

He exaggerated also in the easy way in which he indicated that an outraged husband normally sought out and killed his wife's seducer. Most Chinamen of the class who might be found among the members of a junk's crew would hardly go to the trouble of exposing themselves to the danger of combat. Divorce in China is so easy, and the woman occupies a very inferior position.

The status of women is summed up in a very old Chinese saying which runs:

“Brothers are like hands and feet.

“A wife is like one’s clothes.

“When clothes are worn out one can substitute them for new.

“When hands and feet are cut off, it is difficult to obtain substitutes.”

I cannot say whether thoughts similar to these were passing through the Khan’s mind, but I think it improbable. In the first place his knowledge of Chinese customs was not as extensive as mine; in the second he could hardly afford to take an abstract view of the situation. For him it was so much more personal.

Our long Chinaman had allowed his words a full measure of effect; then he proceeded.

“The husband is here! Being a member of our Brotherhood, however, he has been prevailed upon to listen to reason and to sink his personal inclinations in those of the Guild.”

The Khan, like a prisoner at the bar awaiting sentence after being found guilty, could only emit little noises. It was in me to be deeply sorry for him in his distress, for there was nothing of the theatrical about this inquisition. It was all most frightfully real, and horribly matter of fact.

“He has consented to merge his finer feelings with those of his brothers. He will not claim the fullest reparation allowed by the law provided you pay, and—handsomely!”

The man turned to me, and ignored my companion.

“You are this person’s man of business. You have full power to draw money on his behalf?”

The Chinaman's knowledge was uncanny. Obviously his enquiries had been very thorough.

"Yes," I murmured. I felt that any attempt at prevarication would be futile, and perhaps even unpleasant.

"You," he said, addressing me again, "will be put ashore at a certain spot. You will take with you full authority to secure money, and you will proceed to Macao. That is all. You will have no need to worry. You will be well watched. You will obtain the money, and act normally. You may adjourn to any hotel which you might select, and—you will be visited."

"As for you. . . ." Again he turned to the Khan.

"It has been thought that you might well pay fifteen thousand pounds for your indiscretions in the court, and a further ten thousand pounds for the affair in the hotel! "

I heard the Khan stuttering as he strove to speak. Then words came to him, and they fell in a torrent.

"This is an absolute outrage," he fumed. "What right have you to lay hands on me like this? What do you mean by carrying me off in your foul ship? "

There was much more in the same strain, and the Chinaman heard him out.

"You ask by what right," he said at length. "By every right—by the right of China."

He motioned to one of his men, who produced iron instruments. They were roughly forged, but they appeared formidable enough.

They were laid out on the floor before the Khan, and the long Chinaman walked before them, indicating each in turn with a slippered toe.

"This," he explained, "is an instrument for extracting teeth. It is the one that is used first, and on those who refuse to fall in with our wishes.

"This"—indicating a cruel pair of nippers—"is for those who delay overlong in producing the money. It is used when the money is a week overdue, and it wrenches off the ear—usually the right one, but we allow our victims the preference.

"This"—pointing to a wicked pair of shears—"is for use when a fortnight has elapsed. It is for removing the nose. I regret that in this instance the patient can be given no alternative."

He bowed gravely. "There are other instruments available," he went on, "but we find that these usually suffice."

The Khan found his voice again. "Ruffians!" he spluttered.

A hard look came into the Chinamen's eyes. I doubt if he understood the interjection. Bad as the light was in that cabin, it was strong enough to show his expression quite clearly, and that expression was not an agreeable one.

"You forget something," he said in a metallic voice.

"I forget nothing!"

"You forget that there is on board a member of my crew who would try conclusions with you."

The Khan temporarily wilted, but he made a supreme effort, and pulled himself together.

"But the amount which you demand is preposterous."

"Again you forget," that metallic voice went on. "We do little without reason. We have made every

enquiry, and we are well assured that you can pay."

"But," the Khan angrily declared, "to raise such a sum on the spur of the moment would entail all sorts of complications."

"For you, perhaps, but—not for us!" The Chinaman had a nasty way of expressing himself. Always was there an undercurrent of menace.

"This is terrible," boomed my employer, in a voice like a ship's siren.

"It is," the captain agreed imperturbably, and he glanced down meaningly at the instruments at the Khan's feet.

The Khan winced painfully, then spoke in a very uncertain voice.

"I suppose I shall have to agree, but—you must give me time. . . ."

"You will have ample time." The Chinaman nodded to his satellites.

"Stay with them here," he said, and provide them with writing materials. When all has been arranged, remove the older man to his cabin. The other can stay here. Shortly, we will put him on shore."

He left us, and the Khan, sighing and almost weeping with mortification, proceeded to make out the necessary documents. This was a task which was not done without considerable recrimination. My employer would half complete a page, then tear it up in his rage.

He stalked round the small cabin, declaring to all and sundry that he would not be robbed; then the picture of those iron instruments would return to him, and he would essay his unwelcome task again.

In the end it was finished, and the captain was summoned.

He glanced at the papers upon the improvised table, and addressed himself to me.

"Have you read them?" he demanded.

I intimated that I had.

"Are you satisfied that you will be able to raise the amount which has been stipulated?"

I was.

He turned to the Khan.

"You know sufficient of our ways to know that we do not bluff. We will give your messenger sufficient time to get to Macao—he will find that he will have every assistance in his journey—and then a week may elapse. If the money is not forthcoming in a week, well—you have been warned."

He nodded to his guards, and that was that. The Khan was taken away, and I was allowed the privilege of the captain's cabin.

That night, in the darkness, I was taken ashore. It was impossible for me to identify the spot. Once ashore I was met by a disreputable Chinaman who gave me one glance, then walked stolidly ahead of me.

I followed him, believing that in him I should find some of the assistance which I had been promised.

In the darkness I almost stumbled against a motor-car which was there without lights. It proved to be a very ancient Ford, and it contained two men. They led me in front of the car, switched on its lights and subjected me to a close inspection; then one held open the rear door, and I got in.

There ensued a nightmare drive throughout the

night, and judging by the painful lurchings of the car, across country completely devoid of roads.

In the first dawn the car halted, and the men beckoned me to alight. Neither of them could speak a word other than in their own vernacular, and they contented themselves with pointing.

I looked in the required direction, and on the horizon I could make out buildings. I judged them to represent Macao, and I trudged on.

It was noon before I met any kind of conveyance, and when I eventually arrived at Macao I was exhausted. I had no luggage, but I found an hotel of sorts which would accommodate me, and I slept.

It took me three days to raise the required money—it entailed a considerable amount of cabling—and I sat down in my miserable hotel wondering how these men would make contact with me. That they would I had no doubt, but so far I had been conscious of no surveillance, and indeed, remained so during the whole time of waiting.

I could not help speculating on the fate of the Khan. Would these men release him when I handed over the money, or would greed curb their generosity? Would they retain him in the hope of exacting more?

Even if they did release him as promised, what would be the method of their procedure? Would they just dump him ashore from the junk, or would they conjure him into Macao, safe and sound?

I waited impatiently for the seven days to pass.

These men proved exact in their timing, and they allowed no latitude.

On the very morning of the seventh day, the door of

my bedroom opened, and the Chinese maid sailed in with tea.

Behind her, deferential as always, walked the waiter who had served me with my meals during my stay at the hotel.

He gave me the customary salutation, and handed me a note. It was crossed in curious folds, and as I straightened out the paper the waiter stood by, the very acme of patience and of willing servitude.

I started when I read the brief contents.

The message was laconic. It could hardly have been more so.

It read: "Hand the money to the waiter."

I gazed at the man with stupefaction. Could this inoffensive crawling creature be in league with kidnappers and girl traffickers? There could be no doubt about it—he was.

And I was required to hand over a very considerable sum of money to a man who appeared so excessively happy, and so amazingly humble, when I had tossed him a few cents!

"Do I really hand this packet to you?" I gasped. After all it was still morning, and an atmosphere the very reverse of romantic pervades a dingy hotel bedroom at such an hour.

"The paper says so," he replied, bowing.

"But, will everything be all right?"

"Everything all li—everything all li—my master—he waits!"

That was all very well, but what of the Khan? After all I still had some duty towards my dissolute employer.

"But—my master—the Khan?" I stammered.

The waiter shook his head, and smiled with irritating composure.

"He all li—he all li. He been in hotel three days—he down in kitchen washing dishes! "

And it was true!

"Bring the Khan," I temporised, "and I will hand over the packet."

The impossible man merely bowed.

"Regret—impossible," he said in his sing-song voice. "Give me packet, and your master come in five minutes."

Weakly, I handed over the money, and the waiter disappeared. I was feverishly jumping into my garments when the door burst open, and a furious, bedraggled figure came in like a cyclone.

Its eyes were bloodshot, and it eyed me malignantly. I had to stare hard before I recognised the Khan.

"You fool," he raved. "You absolute imbecile. You lie up here in comfort hoarding my money while I am down below washing up greasy dishes! "

He threw his hands into the air in fury, and stamped round the room, grinding his heels into the miserable carpet in a violent access of rage.

"But if you judged that the money had come. . . . " I expostulated.

"How did I know it had come?" he stormed. "You did nothing—literally nothing. . . . "

"But why wash dishes, and in this very hotel? "

I thought my employer would die of apoplexy.

"Couldn't you have refused? Couldn't you have made a scene, and attracted attention?

A scream of rage was my only answer.

"If you were actually in the hotel, and *you* had done

something, you might have saved yourself this money."

The Khan suddenly ceased in his stamping and collapsed upon my bed.

"It was hell—it was hell," he moaned.

"They brought me to that foul underground kitchen, and. . . ."

He shook with a paroxysm of sobs.

"And what?" I prompted.

"They chained me to that dreadful creature—that man of the crew—who had sworn to have my life. We worked together—we fed together—we slept together. . . .!"

Hastily completing my toilet, I left the Khan to his thoughts.

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It was, of course, inevitable that the cables which had had to be despatched to raise the ransom money should have provoked comment in certain quarters. Other cables followed in the wake of the money.

My employer was ordered to return home, but he refused.

I realised that he was far gone as a drug addict, and I resolved that I could no longer remain in his employment.

I sought out certain authorities, placed him in the hands of a good and efficient doctor, and left him.

Thus, at Macao of all places, ended an amazing period of servitude.

